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Weird Tales

JANUARY

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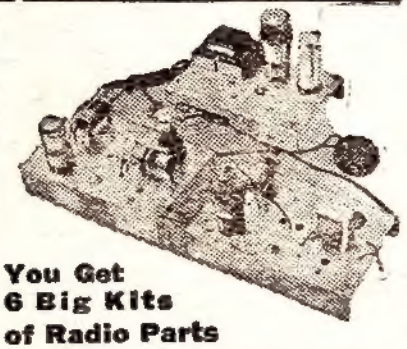

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JANUARY, 1945 Cover by Margaret Brundage

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

Published bi-monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 15 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, 90¢. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. English Office: Charles Lavell, Limited, 4 Clements Inn, Strand, London, W.C.2, England. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession.

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PRINTED IN THE U. S. A. Vol. 38, No. 3

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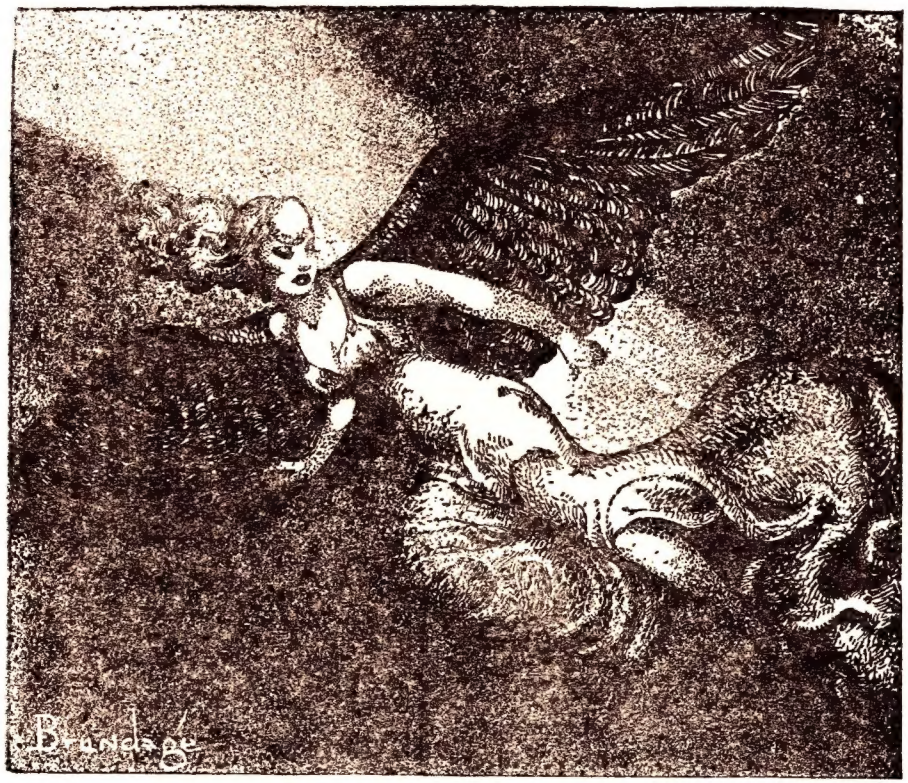
Priestess of the Labyrinth

By EDMOND HAMILTON



The ancient world dreaded the Labyrinth for in it strange magic worked and horror walked curving ways

MARLIN felt the Lightning buck and shudder like a wounded horse as a shell hit the right wing. The stunning shock of the explosion smacked him hard against his belt. He came groggily out of his daze to find that his plane lacked a wing and was tumbling downward through the darkness.

"I *would* have to run into flak on my last mission!" he thought sickly.

No time for further thought! The crippled plane was screaming down through the night toward the Nazi-held island of Crete at increasing speed.

Marlin ripped the cowling open, unbuckled his belt, and clawed his way up out of the seat. Then the wind caught his lanky young figure out of the plane, and he was tumbling head over heels down through the darkness.

The discipline of a Texas training field half the world away held good in Marlin's mind. Automatically, he counted, waited, and pulled his rip-cord. The white cup of the parachute unfolded over his head.

He looked down. A few thousand feet beneath him lay the moon-silvered wash of the Mediterranean. Beyond to the south

stretched the northern shore of Crete, a black mass.

That dark cape down there where anti-aircraft guns were spitting viciously was Candia, he knew. He had been watching the flak only a minute before, as he helped shepherd the bombers that now were swooping toward the target of the city harbor.

Marlin's thin, dark face was grim as he waved after the roaring Liberators. "See you again some day, boys—I hope!"

He turned his attention to his own pre-

Heading by MARGARET BRUNDAGE

dicament. He shortened the parachute cords on one side, trying to drift toward the dark land.

Crete was still in Nazi hands, in this early spring of 1944. The ancient island, seat of the strangest and most mysterious civilization of antiquity, still warded the bastions of the Balkans against Allied invasion.

Three years before, when Brad Marlin had been an archaeological student at Harvard, it had been his dream to visit Crete some day. He had envisioned himself delving into the ruins of that enigmatic and mighty civilization, that great riddle of the past presented by the uncanny myths of Cretan science and power.

But he hadn't planned to visit Crete *this* way! Not dropping out of a night made hideous by screaming anti-aircraft shells and fiery rockets and the thunderous explosion of bombs now hitting the Candia docks.

Marlin knew that at the best, he faced a Nazi concentration camp until the war's end. And his fate might well be worse. Stories had drifted back about the treatment of captured Allied fliers. The Nazis feared coming invasion, feared it enough to make them ruthless in questioning those Allied pilots who fell into their hands.

"If I could hide out in the hills and get down to a fishing-boat some night, I could still get away," Marlin sweated.

But first he had to *reach* those hills! He was drifting down toward the huddled mass of Candia, the big seaport city.

Marlin held the chute-cords tightened until they cut his hands, and prayed for an inshore wind. He hit one at the two-thousand-foot level and it swept him beyond the bomb-rocking city.

He saw the silver thread of a river below, and knew it must be the Karaitos that ran past the ancient site of Knossos. Then those white patches of stone columns and walls below were Knossos itself, the ruins of the ancient Cretan capital?

A FEW minutes later, he alighted on a ridge just beyond the white forest of ruins. The chute dragged him roughly over the bumpy ground until he got it collapsed. He stood panting, a lanky young figure in his flying suit, his black hair bare, his dark, thin face strained.

In the moonlight, the white ruins that were all that was left of ancient Knossos stretched on his right. Farther inland from him, there yawned shadowy gorges that ran back into the hills.

Marlin felt the irony of it as he glanced at the pillared ruins. As a student archaeologist, he had dreamed of coming to this very spot. Its tales of magic wonders, of the cruel sea-kings, of the sorcerer-scientist Daedalus and his doomed son Icarus who had been the first men to fly, of Labyrinth and Minotaur, had puzzled the world for four thousand years.

And now he was here at ruined Knossos —but in mortal danger. He must not fall into Nazi hands. If they hadn't seen him landing, if he could hide out in these hills until he found some native fisherman to smuggle him out—

"Er ist da!" shouted a sharp voice through the moonlit ruins at that moment. *"Schnell!"*

Marlin's hopes shattered like a bubble. He had been seen falling. Dark figures were running toward him through the ruins.

"Stop or we fire!" cried a sharp voice, in English, as Marlin turned and ran toward the inviting darkness of the nearest gorge.

An automatic rifle let go a moment later and bullets screamed off the stone pillars around the running American.

The rattle of the rifle was drowned by the successive explosions of bombs falling, ripping the Nazi barracks between Candia and Knossos. Marlin heard the roar of the Liberators sweeping closer as he ran.

He was in the gorge. He stumbled along a dry stream-bed with the boots of the Nazi patrol pounding loudly behind him. He tripped over loose stones, collided with boulders in the deep shadows.

He could hear the Nazi officer who commanded the small patrol cursing his men and urging them to greater speed. The stone walls of the ravine, sculptured long ago by the builders of dead Knossos, held monstrous bull-headed figures who glared down at the running pilot in the moonlight.

Marlin heard the Nazi officer yelling to his men not to fire, to take the Amerikaner alive. He knew what that meant. It meant a merciless inquisition by the Germans that he would probably not survive.

Blam! Blam!

Flame and thunder rocked the gorge as a stick of bombs started falling along it from

a Liberator a little south off its target.

Marlin knew the rest of the stick was coming, and dived behind a big boulder as the explosions rocked along the rest of the ravine and brought down showers of pebbles from its split rock walls.

He hoped for a moment that one of the bombs had got the patrol pursuing him, but his hopes were dashed when he heard that sharp, hateful voice a moment later.

"Schnell!"

Marlin was breathless, his heart slugging his ribs, as he stumbled on around a curve of the moon-dappled, narrow gorge.

Rock debris was still sliding from a sculptured cliff that had taken the full impact of a bomb. Marlin glimpsed a dark opening or cavity in the shattered cliff.

He stumbled toward it. It was a possible hiding-place. He could not go farther, in any case. This whole region would soon be alive with searching patrols, for now the Liberators were leaving.

He scrambled through the opening, and was surprised to find that it was no mere cavity in the rock but a high, narrow tunnel that led back into the cliff. And it was man-made, for the floor and walls were smoothly squared.

He realized instantly what it was. An ancient passageway of the Cretans, uncovered after ages by the explosion of the bombs.

Marlin grinned mirthlessly in the darkness. "Hell of a way to make an archaeological discovery," he thought.

It was pitch dark in the tunnel. He groped forward. There was an intense silence, all the clamor outside now cut off.

The tunnel curved. It curved until it was going at right angles to his former course. It went straight a little way, then wound spirally downward in what was actually another right-angle change of course, and then again it became a straight passage for a few yards.

Then it curved again until it was following a course at right angles to all *three* of the former directions. And as he went around this final turn of the quadruple curve, Marlin felt a dizzying, sinking sensation as though he were falling through infinite spaces.

Marlin stopped, suddenly startled by realization. "What the devil! I couldn't have made *four* turns all perpendicular to each other!"

THAT was impossible, for there were only three dimensions. Three spatial dimensions, that is—the only fourth dimension was the abstract one of time.

He swore to himself. "I must be getting dizzy and imagining things in this darkness."

Yet Marlin knew he wasn't, that he had really turned in four mutually perpendicular directions. For he had the unerring sense of direction and orientation that a fighter-pilot must have to the last degree.

"But it's crazy! You can't make four different right-angle turns when there are only three dimensions."

Marlin groped mystifiedly onward. Other tunnels forked from the one he followed, he discovered.

He felt utterly baffled. "What the devil kind of a labyrinth is this?"

A labyrinth? No, *the* Labyrinth! He suddenly realized it. He had found the long-hidden and long-sought great secret of ancient Crete!

The very words labyrinthine and labyrinth came from this place. This was the magic maze built beneath ancient Knossos by Daedalus, legendary scientist of Crete, the man supposed to have invented artificial wings.

Marlin remembered those tales of the dread of all the ancient world for the Labyrinth in which strange magic worked, in which horror walked curving ways no man could escape once he entered. Daedalus, they said, had built the Labyrinth and made it the haunt of the Minotaur, the terrible man-bull.

"And that stick of bombs uncovered the entrance to it," Marlin thought. "Hidden all these centuries—"

Marlin found himself groping around another of the uncanny quadruple curves. Again, his head swam with strange dizziness as he rounded the fourth right-angle. Something like panic came over him.

He turned around, to retrace his steps. Then he stopped and stiffened as a sharp echo came through the dark from the way he had come.

"Vorwarts—schnell!"

The Nazi patrol had seen him enter the tunnel and had come into the Labyrinth after him, he realized!

He gave up all thought of turning back and ran on gropingly through the diabolically twisting tunnels. The voices echoed louder behind and he had a dismaying sense of being hopelessly trapped in this ancient maze.

Then came something that brought the hair prickling up on Marlin's neck. It was a sound, but not a sound of voices. And it came from ahead of him, not from behind.

A distant, echoing, bellowing sound, unutterably brutish and hideous, boomed through the darkness of the curving tunnels. That blood-chilling bull-bellow stopped Marlin in his tracks.

"Good God!" he whispered. "That sounds like—"

He could not finish the sentence, even to himself. It was too insanely fantastic.

That hideous bellow had been both human and taurine in quality. It had been like the mingled voice of bull and man.

"Just an echo!" he told himself thickly. "Imagination getting the best of me, making me think of the Minotaur legend."

Yet if the Labyrinth itself was now proved a reality, might not the dreaded Minotaur be real also? The Minotaur, monstrous guardian of the magic maze, surviving centuries and still haunting this place?

The rush of feet, the flash of light from behind him, woke Marlin from his stupor of amazement and spun him around. Two Nazi soldiers, led by an *oberleutnant* with a flashlight, had come around the curve behind him.

"Stop—raise your hands or we shall cut you down!" shouted the German officer as Marlin turned to run.

MARLIN had no choice. The two automatic rifles of the soldiers were trained upon him. The flashlight beam made him a perfect target.

He helplessly raised his hands. The Nazis approached. The young lieutenant searched him efficiently for weapons, and found none.

"Amerikaner, as I thought," he snapped. "Who told you about this hiding place—the Greek underground? How long have they been using it?"

The Nazi lieutenant was younger than Marlin. He was tall, stalwart, superbly muscled, with a face as cold and merciless and handsome as a panther's.

Marlin's lanky figure sagged a little from fatigue and frustration. "I never knew of the place before, and doubt if anyone did," he answered. "The bombs that hit the gorge uncovered it."

"A likely story!" sneered the Nazi. He glanced along the curving tunnel. Its floor and sides were of smooth, massive blocks. The roof was almost out of sight overhead.

"An ancient Cretan relic, without doubt," the German muttered. His eyes narrowed. "I begin to understand now. The ruins of Knossos were excavated for years by Sir Arthur Evans, the English archaeologist. He and his co-workers must have found this place and kept it secret—probably it's been used by Allied spies and the underground right along."

One of the two Nazi soldiers, who had been looking nervously along the tunnel, ventured to address the officer. Marlin knew enough German to understand.

"Lieutenant Preyder, can we not leave? This place is creepy—the giddiness we felt coming through it, and the cry that Blaun heard—"

"Blaun heard an echo!" snapped Preyder scornfully. "And the dizziness is due to the bad air in this place."

"It didn't sound like an echo," muttered the man Blaun. "It sounded like the cry of some monster."

Preyder's ice-gray eyes were fixed on the American. "You are going out with us for questioning. You must know something about the Allied plans for invading Crete."

Marlin had expected that, and he smiled crookedly. "I'm just a fighter-pilot. I rarely talk over strategy with General Wilson."

Preyder's lips tightened. "But you can give valuable information, I'm sure. Gestapo headquarters in Candia will see to that—"

The man Blaun interrupted by opening his mouth and screaming. He screamed like a man who has seen the devil rise before him.

A terrific bull-bellow shook the corridor. Marlin spun, reckless of the rifles. He stiffened, like the others, in horror.

In the shadows beyond the flashlight beam, a vague, monstrous shape towered up and was glaring at them with flaming eyes. Incredible, that monster. The eye saw it but the brain rejected it.

It was human, manlike, in bodily form.

But the misshaped, massive head, the brutish jaws, the great horns of the giant skull—they were not human. Bellowing, it charged toward them.

II

MARLIN was as frozen as the Nazis by the rush of the monstrous creature. That human form, that massive, taurine, horned head with its flaming eyes and gaping jaws—they *couldn't* be real!

Then the American was shocked to the reality of it by the shriek of the Nazi soldier beside Blaun. That man had been nearest the creature, and its lowered horn had caught his side as the thing charged.

"Gott!" screamed the soldier Blaun, scrambling frantically to flee.

Preyder had whipped out his revolver and was firing. The bullets ripped the shoulder of the bull-horned giant, and blood spouted.

That spurt of blood, more than anything else, convinced Marlin that it was no insane nightmare. The crashing echoes of the gunfire were followed by a terrific bellow of pain from the creature.

It turned and with incredible swiftness darted back around the curve of the tunnel. Its bellowing reached them in a hideous, brutish clamor of rage and pain.

Preyder's face was pale and glistening with sweat. "Bull-head and man's body—the Minotaur of ancient legend!" he husked. "But it can't be—"

His revolver warned Marlin back as the American started to bend over the fallen Nazi soldier. Preyder himself stooped over the man, picking up his rifle and then examining him. The man was dead, for that savage horn had ripped his heart.

"The thing was real enough to kill that man of yours," muttered Marlin, feeling an icy horripilation along his spine. "This is the ancient Labyrinth of Knossos, no doubt of that. Legend always said that it was monster-haunted."

"But that thing, monster or not, could not have lived in here for four thousand years!" exclaimed Preyder. "It was flesh and blood, monstrous as it was. And flesh and blood can't live that long."

Thunderous bawling echoes of the man-bull's bellowing rocked the vaulted tunnel again. And they seemed now to be answered from other directions in the dark, intricate maze.

"*Gott,* there are other of the creatures in here!" whispered the shaking man Blaun.

"If there are, we can handle them with the guns!" snapped Preyder. The Nazi officer's pale eyes had a gleam in them now. "We've found something big here—a mystery that must be investigated. But it's a job for headquarters to handle. We'll get out now with this Amerikaner and make our report."

Not for a moment had Marlin been able to make a break. Preyder's gun had covered him since the disappearance of the bull-monster, and now he motioned with the weapon back along the tunnel by which they had come.

The man Blaun seemed frantically eager to get out of the place, as they started back along the curving passage. Preyder followed them closely, the dead man's rifle in his hands.

Clamorous echoes of the hideous taurine bellowing were louder about them now, seeming to come from all directions. They came to a fork in the curving tunnel.

"To the right," ordered the Nazi officer confidently. "That is the way we came."

But the right fork wound left, as soon as they entered it. It curved and curved again in those weirdly dizzying loops and spirals, until they seemed going ever deeper into the baffling Labyrinth.

Preyder stopped and swore. "We'll have to go back and take the other turn."

But they did not seem able to find that fork when they retraced their steps. For what seemed hours, they stumbled through the dark tunnels in vain search. And ever the brutish bellowing was louder, nearer!

Marlin's head reeled. The geometry of this maze was unearthly. That was the only word for it. Time and again they would go through one of those uncanny quadruple loops which each time gave Marlin the dizzying sensation of moving through a fourth dimension.

The terror of the man Blaun was now extreme. The bellowing followed them, always behind. Flaming eyes watched from the darkness behind them. Yet when Preyder turned the beam back, they would never be in time to see anything but a flash of movement.

"There must be a dozen of the creatures," Preyder muttered. "What in hell's name are they?"

He speculated aloud. "Genetic experiments might produce such monsters. But why here, in this hidden maze? It's too cursed appropriate with the Minotaur legend."

His flashlight beam was dimming, the battery failing. Preyder forced a pace of desperate urgency. They stumbled through the curving ways with the little light growing weaker each moment. And the bull-bellowing behind grew louder, nearer, exultant.

It seemed like a crazy dream, to Marlin. He'd wake up and find himself back at Bengasi base with the morning sun pouring through the tent-flap. He'd draw a long sigh of relief to find himself awake—

The light went out! A wail of terror from the man Blaun was echoed by a savage chorus of taurine bellowing from behind.

"Keep your rifle against the Amerikaner and shoot if he tries to escape in the dark!" exclaimed Preyder to the Nazi soldier.

Flaming eyes were coming toward them through the dark. Preyder fired at them. But the crashing roar of gunfire was followed only by the whine of bullets glancing off the curved stone walls.

"Look—there's a light!" screamed Blaun.

Marlin saw. It was a dim, effulgent white glow that was dawning along the curving tunnel from behind them.

It came into view, something tiny and glowing that was advancing along the curving passageway.

"Good God!" muttered Marlin. "It's a girl!"

The figure approaching almost confirmed his belief that he was dreaming. She was as uncannily beautiful as the bull-men had been uncannily hideous.

SHE was tall and fair-haired, a slim figure in low-cut waist and long, flounced white skirt. Her yellow hair, falling to her shoulders, was bound around her temples by a golden circlet in the front of which was set a great crystal that emitted the soft, dim glow of light.

Marlin's skin crawled as he saw that in the shadows just behind her the flaming eyes of the man-bulls were advancing also, and that she paid no attention to them as they followed her. Her sea-blue eyes were fixed in wide amazement on the three men, her face white and startled.

"You are men from beyond!" she gasped, amazement and dawning terror in her eyes. "You have opened the Labyrinth!"

Marlin could only vaguely understand her language. It was Greek—not the ancient Attic he had learned in his Harvard classrooms but a dimly distorted dialect of that tongue.

"What do you mean? Who are you?" he husked in halting Attic.

"*Gott,* look at her arms!" choked Blaun.

Marlin looked, and felt a deepened sense of the uncanny. He had noticed that the girl wore golden, serpent-like ornaments twined around her arms. Now he saw that the golden serpents were alive. They were not metal, but little golden snakes which entwined each arm and raised their heads to stare at the men with wise, wide yellow eyes.

A girl out of mystery, a girl who spoke the ancient tongue and wore living serpents like the snake-goddesses of the ancient world, and who seemed to have no fear of the incredible taurine horde shuffling in the deep shadows behind her!

Preyder broke in. The Nazi officer apparently knew the classical Greek of the schoolroom also, and he spoke sharply to the girl.

"Are you of the underground?" he demanded of her. "What are those brutes behind you?"

The girl glanced only a moment back at the vague, monstrous forms of the shadowy shapes that bulked behind flaming eyes.

"The Minotaurs? Do not be afraid—they will not harm you. They obey me always."

The Minotaurs? Marlin's brain reeled. Legend was coming true before his eyes. What did it all mean?

"I am Luane, priestess of the Temple and daughter of the high priest," she was saying rapidly. The dread in her blue eyes deepened as she added, "Your opening of the Labyrinth is a disaster neither he nor I had foreseen: You must come at once with me to my father Daedalus!"

"Daedalus?" Even Preyder was stunned out of his suspicious attitude for a moment by that name.

Daedalus, legendary builder of the Laby-

rinth? The fabulous sorcerer-scientist of ancient Crete who was even supposed to have invented artificial human wings that had brought death to his son Icarus? This girl—the daughter of Daedalus?

Luane seemed to understand Marlin's stupefaction, the Nazi's incredulity. "My father will explain all to you. But you must come with me at once. There is terrible danger every moment that you linger here!"

Her desperate urgency, the dread of mysterious catastrophe that widened her eyes, penetrated the daze of the men.

"She's either crazy or lying but she must know a way out of this devil's maze," muttered Preyder. "We will go with her. But you'll get a bullet in the back if you try an escape, Amerikaner!"

"This way—and hurry!" Luane exclaimed, already leading the way forward along the curving tunnel, the radiant jewel on her forehead lighting the way dimly.

Marlin followed at her heels, Blaun and the officer close behind him. And in the shadows behind *them* came the shuffling, trampling footsteps of the monsters the girl had called Minotaurs.

Marlin's brain was beginning to grasp a possible unearthly explanation of this mad situation. He was remembering the uncanny quadruple curves of the twisting maze, that had given him the sensation of turning through a fourth dimension. The fourth dimension of matter was *time*. Then this incredible Labyrinth wound its maze not only through space but also through time? Had brought them into past time when ancient Crete existed?

LUANE'S steps were quickening, as though dread spurred her. She led the way through the insane maze without the slightest uncertainty. Finally the tunnel they followed ended in a heavy door of silvery metal.

Luane bent forward, so that the crystal upon her forehead touched an engraved boss on the door. The door clicked, and then swung open.

"Hurry, now!" she pleaded as they passed through the door. "There is no safety until we reach my father's laboratory."

They had entered a dark, vault-like room of stone. The girl was hastening toward a spiral of stone steps that climbed upward around it.

Marlin looked back wonderingly. The massive silver door had swung shut behind them. The monstrous horde of bull-men, then, had not followed them up out of the tunnels?

"They do not leave the Labyrinth," Luane said quickly, as though guessing his thought. "They do not like the upper world, those poor children of pain and darkness."

"Where are we?" demanded Preyder harshly, suspiciously, his gaze searching the dim, vaulted room.

"In the lowest level of the Temple of Wisdom," answered the girl. "Come quickly!"

They climbed after her. Daylight, sunlight, showed somewhere above them. Marlin saw that the little golden serpents twined around the girl's arms now lifted their heads eagerly toward the light, preening themselves.

They climbed up into a big oblong ball of unstained white marble whose brilliant light dazzled their eyes. The light came from a pillared window at one end, which opened on a landscape of white sunlight.

The man Blaun uttered a hoarse cry. "Where are we? This is not Crete!"

Marlin was stunned by the vista too. But not as much as the Nazis. He had been half-expecting this.

Outside lay a mighty city, one larger and far different than any town of modern Crete. Tens of thousands of unpretentious houses of sun-dried brick, a sea of flat roofs, stretched toward the blue sea and the harbor in which were a forest of masts. Far out on the sea, strange galleys with colored sails were cleaving the waves.

Through the streets of the city swirled a bewilderingly polyglot crowd. Marlin's eyes ran over them dazedly. Cretan soldiers in bronze helmets, armed with heavy swords and double-bladed axes; Greeks in short chitons; dark-faced Egyptians in linen robes; towering, skin-clad Hittites; all the ancient Mediterranean world seemed represented here.

On a low hill a mile eastward rose a structure that was colossal. It dominated the city, that massive, oblong marble bulk that crouched like a drowsing white dragon watching the sea. Those looming walls and

colonnades of pillars, those giant stairways and rounded cupolas, were familiar to Marlin as though remembered from a dream.

"The palace of Minos!" he husked. "And this city is Knossos in the great age of Crete!"

Luane had an agony of apprehension in her face. "You must not linger here. If Minos learns of your coming—"

Marlin knew his guess had been right. That alien Labyrinth whose tunnels curved in time had brought them four thousand years into the past.

III

PREYDER had taken the shock of realization even more than Marlin, for the Nazi had no mental preparation for it. His widened eyes turned from the incredible vista outside to glare at Luane.

"Knossos? *That's* not Knossos!" he snapped. "What kind of trick is this? Where have you brought us?"

His raised rifle menaced her. "Answer, or I'll—"

Luane made no movement. But the golden snakes that entwined her arms suddenly moved, with a swiftness beyond belief.

They shot like flying shafts of gold through the air toward the Nazi. They whipped around Preyder's neck and tightened.

The Nazi staggered, clawing the air, dropping the gun as his face went purple. The other German recoiled with a cry of horror.

"Loose the man, my daughter!" commanded a deep, urgent voice.

Marlin whirled. The man who had entered the hall was dressed in the long cloak of ancient Crete, a white garment edged with black designs.

His hair was thin and gray. The face was the withered countenance of an old man. But the eyes, black, glowing, afire with life and inteligence, were ageless.

Luane uttered a low, honeyed note of sound. The golden snakes ceased to tighten around Preyder's neck. They entwined with blurring speed and leaped back onto Luane's upraised arms, coiling lovingly around them. The old man had advanced. His deep eyes widened as they looked at Marlin and the Nazis. "Then there *was* someone in the Labyrinth, as the Minotaur's outcries betokened?" he said swiftly to the girl.

"Yes, but not Minos' spies as we thought," Luane answered. "These are men from across time. The Labyrinth has been opened!" Daedalus blanched, like a man receiving a shock of terrible intelligence.

"The Labyrinth opened?" he whispered. "But if Minos learns of this, it means—"

Urgent alarm and haste flashed into his eyes. "Quick, to my laboratory! Minos' mental vision cannot see there!"

Marlin dazedly allowed himself to be hustled with the other two through a series of connecting halls and corridors, by Daedalus and his daughter. The stunned Preyder attempted no further resistance.

The American glimpsed a few white-robed men servitors of the temple, Cretans who stared at them wonderingly. Then they were led into a small, windowless room of octagonal shape, whose walls were sheets of dull lead. It was illuminated by silver lamps. The room was a laboratory; but not such a one as he had known in his own time.

Many instruments were of familiar design—crucibles, retorts and other chemical apparatus. But there were also ancient alembics, charcoal braziers, twisted glass tubes through which bubbled yellow gases, metal geometrical models of outlandish alienage that made the eye ache to look at.

"Not even Minos' mental vision can penetrate these walls of lead," muttered Daedalus. "But if he should already have learned that the Labyrinth had been opened—"

SUPREME apprehension was in his face and in Luane's. Marlin recognized their dread, even though he was mystified by it.

"*You* built that Labyrinth?" Marlin said hoarsely to the old Cretan. "Legends for four thousand years have spoken of Daedalus as its builder."

"Four thousand years?" murmured the old man. "Then you come from that far in future time?"

Preyder was staring wildly. "Does it mean that we came in that hellish maze through *time?*" he husked to the American.

Marlin nodded shakenly. "We're in ancient Crete. How, I don't know. Except that that maze is a miracle of super-geometry that twists in four dimensions. Legend has spoken of it for forty centuries, and of the Minotaurs—"

Daedalus broke in. "The Minotaurs were

not of *my* creation, stranger. Minos made those monsters, out of men. And they fled to me for refuge, and I gave it to them."

Marlin's brain reeled. "I don't understand all this. In my day, it was only wild myth."

Preyder's eyes had begun to gleam. "What a secret to stumble upon! A pathway into past time!"

Luane was at her father's side, her blue eyes troubledly surveying the three men as her father rapidly spoke.

"I cannot explain everything to you," Daedalus said. "But this I must tell you—your coming has threatened Knossos and all our world with dark evil. Yes, and because you have penetrated the Labyrinth and come here, that evil danger threatens even your own far future age!"

"Danger? Danger from what?" demanded Marlin, his thin young face puzzled.

"From Minos," came the answer. "The king who is lord of Crete and who wields a dark wisdom equalling my own. And who is evil incarnate in his purposes!"

He almost spat the words. And Marlin began to remember now that the old legends spoke of Minos the king and Daedalus the scientist as deadly enemies—enemies wielding the magic of ancient wisdom.

"We have science, we of Crete," Daedalus was saying. "Perhaps not the same as your science of the future. I perceive by your dress and weapons that you have mastered many material forces. We have concentrated on other problems, on the subtle laws of time and space and life.

"Greatest of scientists in our land are Minos, hereditary king, and I, high priest of this Temple of Wisdom. But the researches of Minos have always been unholy. For he has long cherished a black, evil purpose.

"Minos has always wished to breed new, monstrous, semi-human races who would serve him and extend his power over all the earth! Years ago, he sought for the ultimate seeds of life, the tiny germs that control every aspect of a living creature's growth and formation.

"He found those controlling germs of life, and bred horrible new creatures from human stock. Men who had only a travesty of human shape, whom the experiments of Minos had caused to grow into bestial forms! Yes, the beast-headed monsters whom you saw in the Labyrinth, the poor mockeries of humanities whom Minos called his Minotaurs!

"Those creatures escaped their master and came to me. They hoped that I could make them human. But I could not. I could only give them refuge here and refuse to return them to Minos. But I resolved that Minos should make no more Cretans into such monsters!

"I told Minos that if he took any more Cretans to create unholy races, I would raise the whole Cretan people against him by telling them just what he was doing! He had to desist, but from that time forward Minos has hated me."

Marlin was horrified. So *this* was why horror had clung to the name of Minos for forty centuries!

THE Cretan sorcerer-king had engaged in blackly evil genetic experiments in his efforts to create new monstrous races to buttress his power!

Daedalus was continuing urgently. "I was then engaged in a great experiment of my own. I believed that I could create a super-geometrical pattern that would enter four dimensions and thus would penetrate time, past and future. Beneath this Temple, I built the Labyrinth.

"I pierced thus into other ages. I looked forth, and saw Knossos as it will be in future ages, dead and ruined. I looked even farther and saw strange things of Earth to be that even you do not know.

"But then Minos learned of my achievement. He came to me. He wished me to let him use the Labyrinth. My threat to tell the people had prevented him from using any more Cretans for his hideous life-experiments. He proposed to use the Labyrinth to raid future ages for human subjects!

"I refused! I sealed up every outlet of the Labyrinth into future ages, so that it could not be used. Minos and Pasiphae and their evil followers, much as they wished, could not hope to find the sealed openings of the Labyrinth even had they taken possession of it by force and overcome the Minotaurs whom I let dwell in it."

Daedalus' heavy voice rang with dread foreboding as he concluded his rapid recital.

"But if Minos learns now that the Labyrinth has been opened from outside our time, then he would move at once to seize it and

use it as a roadway for the raiding of future ages!"

Marlin stared incredulously. "Then what do you intend to do? With us?"

Luane answered urgently. "Father, they must go back through the Labyrinth to their own time, and the Labyrinth must be sealed again."

Daedalus nodded anxiously. "That is the only solution. But first, we must be sure that Minos is not watching—"

Preyder broke in eagerly. "Wait! I could help you to conquer Minos!"

Marlin looked at the Nazi in sharp distrust. Preyder was excitedly explaining to the old scientist and the girl.

"In my own future age," the Nazi declared, "this island of Crete is held by my countrymen, the Germans. They are defending it against a motley horde of nations who attacked us. Our soldiers could come through the Labyrinth to *this* time, and help you sweep Minos from the throne!"

Preyder added eagerly, "In return, we'd ask only the privilege of taking refuge in this time if our enemies invade the island —of taking refuge merely until we can go back and counter-attack them by surprise."

Marlin gasped at the hellish audacity of the Nazi's plan. He saw instantly its terrific menace to the Allied cause.

The Allied forces, sooner or later, would invade Crete. If the Germans could retreat through the Labyrinth to this past age, they could wait until a favorable moment and mount a sudden counter-attack of stunning surprise. An ambush from time!

"Don't believe him!" Marlin cried to the two Cretans. "His people are not defending the island—they invaded it and now oppress its inhabitants, and my country and others are seeking to liberate it!"

"A lie," said Preyder flatly. "This American is of my nation's enemies, and that is why he twists the truth."

Daedalus spoke sternly. "I know nothing of the wars in your future age, nor do I wish to know them. I do know that you three must all return through the Labyrinth to your own time as quickly as possible."

The old scientist added meaningly, "I shall use hypnotic means to wipe all memory of it from your minds before you are thrust out of the Labyrinth. And I shall seal it again, so that no others may come through. And this must be done at once, before Minos learns that it was ever opened."

"But my people can offer you riches and power for your alliance!" Preyder persisted.

Daedalus looked icily at the Nazi. "Minos offered me power and riches, and I refused. No, you go back to your own time!"

He turned toward his daughter. "We shall take them at once, Luane. But first—"

He stopped. Preyder, turning away to a little distance, had suddenly whipped out his revolver and was covering Luane with it.

"This weapon kills instantly," snapped the Nazi. "If those serpents of yours move this time, you'll die at once."

Daedalus and Luane were frozen, and so for the moment was Marlin.

"There is a secret here that can mean ultimate victory for the Reich," Preyder went on harshly to the old Cretan scientist. "You're going to help me make use of it, or your daughter will pay the penalty."

Marlin jumped! He had been tensing himself for the last few seconds and he swept toward Preyder in a low, flying tackle.

The man Blaun was too dazed by events to act quickly. But Preyder whirled with wolf-like swiftness and shot.

The gun went off almost in Marlin's face. He felt a scorching blast of flame, a terrific blow, and then nothing.

IV

MARLIN came back to consciousness with the salt stickiness of dried blood on his forehead and a feeling that his skull had split apart. He opened his eyes to find that he lay on the floor of the octagonal laboratory. The silver lamps still glowed softly, but the room was silent.

He stumbled up and then saw the withered, prostrate figure of Daedalus lying nearby. The old Cretan scientist was sprawled in front of a silver cabinet of instruments, blood seeping from a bullet wound in his side.

Marlin looked wildly around. The two Nazis and the girl Luane were gone.

He bent and frantically tried to revive the old Cretan. "What happened? Where is Preyder?"

Daedalus appeared mortally wounded. Yet the old scientist's eyes opened, and he whispered faintly.

"The phial of blue liquid," he murmured hoarsely. "In the cabinet—"

Marlin stumbled to the silver cabinet and searched hastily. There were many strange-looking instruments and vessels in it. But he soon found a flat, twisted-necked glass phial of bright blue fluid.

He returned quickly with it to the Cretan. "Break the neck and pour the liquid into my wound," whispered Daedalus.

Marlin obeyed, drawing the old man's cloak aside and letting the blue drug drip into the bullet-hole in the withered flesh.

The results amazed him. The lips of the wound drew together as though from a super-clotting agent affecting tissues as well as blood. And strength and life seemed to pour back into Daedalus' pallid face.

The Cretan sat up in a few moments. There was an agony of dread in his wide eyes as he looked up at Marlin.

"Your enemy left us both for dead!" he exclaimed. "After he struck you down with his weapon, he turned it upon me also as I was rushing to call the Minotaurs against him!"

Marlin raised an unsteady hand to his head. Preyder's bullet had grazed his skull only, but the wound that had stunned him would have been interpreted by the Nazi as a fatal one.

"As consciousness left me," Daedalus was continuing hoarsely, "I heard the man you call Preyder and the other one binding and gagging Luane. They were going with her to Minos! Your enemy plans to make with Minos the bargain that he could not make with me!"

Terrible apprehension gripped Marlin at this information. He saw again all the dread possibilities if Preyder succeeded in turning the unearthly Labyrinth into a weapon of Nazi strategy.

Preyder's reasoning was clear. The Nazi must have allies in this ancient time-world if his compatriots were to use the Labyrinth. Daedalus had refused the unholy alliance. So he had gone to Minos, who also desired to use the road through time for evil purposes.

"But why would he take Luane with them?" Marlin cried.

"You forget what I told you—that only Luane and myself know the Labyrinth well enough to find the openings to other ages," Daedalus replied. "They will need Luane to be their guide."

"Then without her, they could not use the Labyrinth?" Marlin exclaimed. "Then we've got to get her out of their hands at once!"

Daedalus nodded swiftly. His eyes were solemn. "Yes, we must risk all to get Luane away from them and then close the Labyrinth again."

Rapidly, he thought aloud. "Your enemy will tell Minos that I am dead. And Minos will rejoice, and will at once send to seize this temple so that they may force Luane to guide them through the Labyrinth."

"Then, at once, we've got to get into Minos' palace and free your daughter—and there's just the two of us, without weapons!" Marlin exclaimed. He was appalled by the dire necessity facing them.

"I have weapons, of a certain kind," muttered Daedalus. He went to the silver cabinet, and hurriedly took from it some small copper instruments which he put in an inner pocket of his cloak. "Now come with me!"

The old Cretan seemed to have recovered miraculous strength from the blue drug that had closed his wound. Marlin stumbled at his heels, out of the lamplit laboratory into the marble halls of the temple.

Night had fallen upon Knossos while they lay unconscious. The porticos gave a view of the great, dark city, its streets splashed with red torchlight, the lighted windows of Minos' great palace on the distant hilltop glaring out over the nighted town and sea.

Thin, vague starlight came through the openings into the temple halls. Marlin stumbled over something small and soft and looked down to discover that it was the dead, crushed body of one of Luane's little pet golden serpents. The other lay nearby.

Daedalus had found the bodies of two of the temple servitors, across the room. The men had been shot by Preyder and Blaun. They were naked except for loincloths, their cloaks missing.

"The Nazis put their cloaks on so that their strange clothing would not be noticed going through the city," muttered Marlin.

"Listen!" Daedalus exclaimed.

A heavy tramp of feet was approaching the Temple of Wisdom. They glimpsed a long column of bronze-helmeted soldiers led by torchbearers coming through the streets toward them.

"Minos' guards, coming here to seize the temple and Labyrinth as I thought!" said the old Cretan.

"Let's get out of here then before they find us!" Marlin cried, starting toward the door.

"Wait!" Daedalus commanded. "We can do nothing that way. Minos' palace is always ringed by guards. We could not even approach it."

"But we've got to make the attempt!" Marlin exclaimed desperately.

"Yes, but not that way. Come with me."

To the American's surprise, Daedalus led him up a spiral stairway that climbed to the very top of the temple. They emerged onto its flat roof.

The Temple of Wisdom was a massive octagon building of great height. Up here in the windy darkness, they were far above the torchlit streets of Knossos.

Daedalus went to a small shed-like structure on the roof, unlocking it and entering. He returned in a moment, bringing two big and grotesque-looking devices.

"These are our only means of reaching and entering Minos' palace unobserved," he declared. "I had kept this invention secret lest Minos hear of it. Not since my son Icarus was killed making trial of them, have I used these wings."

Marlin stared dumfoundedly at the thing which Daedalus had handed him. He suddenly remembered all those old legends that told of Daedalus' invention of a means of flight and of the death of his son in its trial. For the thing *was* a pair of big, artificial wings.

They were broad, batlike pinions six feet in length, made of a dark, skinlike substance stretched on a light interior skeleton. The wings seemed to grow like living ones out of a flat, heavy mass of muscular flesh covered by gray, lifeless skin. To it was attached a harness.

"But these wings surely can't enable you to fly!" Marlin protested incredulously. "There's no motive power, no machinery at all."

"I told you before that our Cretan science concentrates not on matter and machines but on the forces of life and space and time," reminded Daedalus. "There is pseudo-life in these wings and in the powerful muscles that operate them. It is quiescent now but it will kindle to awakening when you wear the wings against your body."

He showed Marlin by example how to buckle the strong leather harness around his shoulders, so that the flat muscle-mass between the wings was clasped tightly against his back between the shoulders.

Marlin obeyed unbelievingly. "But it's impossible! The things are just lifeless matter—"

He broke off suddenly. He had felt an uncanny twitching of that mass of pseudo-living muscle clasped against his back.

It was an almost horrible sensation, that writhing and flexing of powerful tendons which a minute before had been lax and dead.

"The wings are waking to life from the kindling aura of your own living flesh!" Daedalus warned. "When they begin to beat strongly, run with me along the roof and launch yourself into the air."

Marlin felt the flexing of the great artificial muscles against his back, swiftly increasing in power. A breeze fanned his cheeks as the great batlike pinions behind him began to sweep to and fro.

The wings that Daedalus wore had begun to flap also. Both men staggered unsteadily as their threshing wings almost lifted them.

"Now!" exclaimed the old Cretan. "With me—we fly!"

He was darting across the roof toward its edge, his wings now flapping powerfully.

MARLIN, feeling more than ever caught in a fantastic dream, mechanically ran forward after the other. He was nearly to the edge of the roof—then he flung himself forward into empty space.

He did not fall! Instead, he rocketed forward into the darkness, borne up by the powerful threshing of the great pinions at his back.

"Steer upward, like this!" Daedalus' thin call reached his ears.

Marlin looked up and saw the old Cretan against the stars, soaring upward on beating wings as he extended his upcurved arms before him like a rudder. The American imitated the action with his own arms, and rose rapidly until he was flying close beside Daedalus.

Marlin looked down. They were high above the dark streets and winking torches

of Knossos. Down to the right lay the black harbor and the lanterns of gliding galleys. From below, he knew, they could not be seen except as batlike shadows against the stars.

He felt a wild thrill as the throbbing wings at his back bore him onward with Daedalus through the upper night, the chill wind roaring around him and hammering at his face.

"I've flown a lot in my own time, but this is different and better!" he called.

"Yes, but the wings have their limits," warned Daedalus. "They can fly only a few hours without rest—then their pseudo-life dies and they collapse. It was so my son Icarus died, trying too long a flight."

The massive palace of Minos loomed up on its distant hilltop, ahead of them. The old Cretan soared still higher, until at last they were a thousand feet above the flat roof of the monster marble structure.

Then he turned, using arms and legs as rudder, and Marlin imitated him. They began to glide down through the darkness toward the palace roof.

"Be ready to unharness the wings the moment we land!" cautioned Daedalus.

Marlin glimpsed bronze-armored guards stationed at every entrance of the great royal structure. But there was no one on the roof. Who would expect intruders from the sky?

His arms extended downward like the Cretan's, he planed down through the darkness until his feet touched the roof. He had the harness of the wings already unbuckled, and instantly he slipped it off.

He sprawled on his face on the roof from the shock of the alighting. When he picked himself up, he found that the wings he had hastily discarded had at once ceased their flapping. The strange pseudo-life of their artificial muscles could only operate when in close contact with real life.

Daedalus had landed more deftly. For a moment, they listened. There were dim sounds from the palace beneath them, but no sound that betokened discovery of them.

The old scientist handed Marlin a long, sharp, bronze dagger. "You may need this —I have other weapons. Now come with me."

HIDING the lax and lifeless pair of wings in the shadow of the parapet that bounded the roof, Daedalus then began a careful search along that low, massive wall.

It was constructed of huge marble blocks. The Cretan finally fixed upon one of these. He groped at it with his fingers, then pulled. The great block swung silently aside, disclosing a black opening that led down inside the great wall of the building.

Daedalus turned to the American. "I was the architect of Minos' palace," he explained in a whisper. "I thank the gods now for that, for I know every secret passageway that the tyrant had built into its walls."

He added, "this is the only road by which we can hope to find Luane. If we succeed in doing so, we shall return by this same way and then when you have gone back through the Labyrinth I shall close it forever."

The Cretan disappeared down into the black opening. Marlin, following, found that there was a narrow, steep stair inside the wall.

They went down many steps, then along a cramped passage. Daedalus stopped, applied his eye to a tiny aperture in the inner wall.

"They would not have her in the throne-room," he murmured. "We must search further."

Marlin, lingering a moment to look through the little aperture, saw a vast, torch-lit hall paved with red and white gypsum slabs. Its walls were brilliantly painted with figures of wild bulls and lions, and swarthy, armored Cretan soldiers stood beside a massive, empty throne.

Daedalus led onward, seeming to know his way without hesitation through the cunning hidden passages of the walls. Presently he stopped again at a tiny loophole.

"These are Minos' apartments," he began to whisper, then suddenly stiffened. His thin hand gripped Marlin's arm. "Luane is here! And Minos and Pasiphae, and your enemy—"

Marlin almost crowded him bodily from the tiny aperture, to see. He looked this time into a much smaller room, similarly paved in red and white, hung with brilliant silks, illuminated by swinging lamps.

He instantly saw Luane. The fair-haired Cretan girl sat in a high chair of carved wood, bound to it by hide thongs. Her face was very white but there was defiance and hatred in her blue eyes.

She was looking bitterly at the others in the room. Preyder, fantastically incongruous in his drab modern uniform, stood beneath the central lamp. The man Blaun, rifle in hand, was staring from the side of the room where a half-dozen watchful Cretan warriors were stationed.

"It means power unlimited for you over *your* world, and for my nation over the world of *our* time!" Preyder was saying eagerly in his halting Attic.

The Nazi officer was speaking to the Cretan man and woman who sat in massive silver chairs at the far side of the room.

"Minos and the queen Pasiphae!" Daedalus muttered in Marlin's ear. "Your enemy has made his bargain with them!"

Minos was well over middle age, but his long hair and flowing beard were raven black. His vulpine face, dead white as that of a corpse, was a fitting setting for the infinitely cunning eyes with which he looked at the enthusiastic Nazi. His attire was a rich, gold-worked silken cloak.

The woman was far different. Pasiphae looked slim as Luane, and as young. But when Marlin glanced at her bold eyes he revised estimates of her age. There were unclean depths in those eyes. Not even the lush beauty of her figure in its clinging green silks could banish that taint.

Minos, stroking his beard with jewelled fingers, asked the Nazi a question in a hoarse, thick voice.

"If your nation is so powerful in its own time, why are you so hard-pressed by enemies that you need the Labyrinth as refuge?"

"It will be only a temporary refuge," Preyder answered quickly. "We Germans will merely retreat through it to this time for a period, and then issue forth again in surprise attack to crush our enemies."

He added, "And even if our enemies should gain victory in this whole war, we can use the Labyrinth to defeat them ultimately. For we can retreat through it to this time, secretly amass forces here for another war, and issue forth to conquer our world by an attack of complete surprise."

Marlin was aghast. For the first time, he realized the full scope of Preyder's scheming. It was not merely the possession of Crete which formed the stake for which the Nazi was plotting.

It was a chance for Germany to launch a third world war upon mankind. Preyder, like most other Nazis, must realize the inevitable triumph of the Allies. But when that triumph came, the Nazis could secretly gather forces and prepare for a new assault on civilization by taking refuge through the Labyrinth in this age of the past!

V

THE king Minos nodded his head indifferently at the Nazi's explanation.

"Your nation and its wars in the future world mean little to me," he declared. "But I need an inexhaustible supply of human subjects to breed into the beast-races which can extend my power over all this world. And if I use people of this time as subjects, they will rise against me."

"Germany will furnish you as many human captives as you need from the races we shall conquer when our triumph is complete," Preyder promised.

"Then it is agreed between us," Minos said. "Tomorrow we will enter the Labyrinth, with sufficient warriors to slay the Minotaurs who haunt it. I bred the creatures but they hate me for it and were fanatically devoted to Daedalus, so they will have to be killed.

"Now that Daedalus is dead," he went on, "the priestess Luane is the only one who can guide us through the Labyrinth to the tunnels that open onto future ages."

Luane spoke in a low, throbbing voice. "I will never guide you, so that you may work evil on the future world and on this one."

Minos smiled tolerantly, fingering his beard. "Torture will change your mind. There are devices in my laboratories which will bring you whimpering to my feet in submission."

Marlin turned frantically from the peephole to Daedalus. The old Cretan had drawn from his cloak one of the small instruments he had brought with him, and was bending over it in the darkness.

"We've got to get in there somehow!" Marlin whispered hoarsely. "At the least, I've got to kill that devil Preyder!"

"There is a secret door beneath the loophole which can be swung open," Daedalus whispered swiftly. "But not yet! It would be useless to rush out onto the swords of Minos' guards."

He was fumbling with the little instrument. It was a circular copper frame in which four curious black prisms revolved on an axle around a larger black prism whose facets were cut in a baffling design. The old Cretan was spinning the rotating prisms rapidly around the central one.

"I told you that I was not without weapons of a certain kind," he muttered. "Wait!"

"But there's no time to wait!" Marlin protested wildly. "If we—"

His words froze on his lips. An uncanny thing was happening. The prisms were rotating so fast that they could be seen only as black blur. And that blur of blackness was *spreading*.

It was spreading outward like water flowing from a fountain—a fountain of utter darkness.

In the dim light that came through the loophole of the wall, Marlin could see that flowing darkness seeping out through the solid wall itself, expanding in all directions.

"Wait until the darkness grips the chamber, then pull open the door by the handles below the loophole!" Daedalus whispered. "You'll have a chance to snatch Luane back in here, in the dark!"

AT THAT moment, Marlin standing by the loophole with one hand gripping the stone handles below it and the other grasping his long dagger, he heard a sharp cry from inside Minos' chamber.

A Cretan captain in plumed helmet and bronze had burst into the room from a door opposite. He ran toward Minos.

"Highness, my warriors and I seized the Temple of Wisdom as you ordered but we did not find Daedalus' body in it!" he reported.

Minos' vulpine face raged and he leaped to his feet. "Then he is not dead, as you told me!" he hissed at Preyder.

"He *must* be dead!" Preyder declared bewilderedly. "I shot him myself—"

Minos' furious face stiffened suddenly as he looked beyond the Nazi. The expanding cloud of darkness, bursting through the solid wall, had already engulfed half of the lamplit chamber.

"Daedalus' darkness-magic!" yelled the king. "He's *here!* Guards!"

Even as the bewildered Cretan guards ran forward, the darkness expanded to fill the whole chamber.

Instantly Marlin pulled hard, felt the heavy stones slide inward. He burst through the aperture into the chamber. He was in absolute, utter pitch-darkness, every ray of light blotted out by Daedalus' apparatus.

He had already taken the bearings of every object in the chamber and he plunged straight toward the chair in which Luane sat bound.

"Luane, it's your father and I!" he whispered as his dagger sliced the hide thongs that bound her to the chair.

He heard her sob of relief as he pulled her to her feet. Minos was raging in the darkness, Preyder was yelling furiously to Blaun.

Marlin, lunging back with Luane through the darkness, collided with a uniform-clad man and struck with his dagger in wild hope that it was Preyder. But it was Blaun's throaty death-cry that shuddered out.

"Daedalus or his friends are in this chamber!" bellowed Minos' voice. "Range around the walls and link hands!"

But Marlin was already thrusting Luane through the unseen door into the wall. He felt the stones slide shut as Daedalus closed them.

"Up to the roof at once!" Daedalus exclaimed urgently. "The darkness will die as the prisms stop spinning."

"There's no escape from the roof!" Luane gasped as they ran. "We'll be trapped."

"We have the wings there," answered her father swiftly. "They can carry double weight for a short distance. We must get back to the temple and close the Labyrinth."

They emerged onto the roof, beneath the stars. But now the whole great palace was alive with noises of alarm beneath them. They heard men rushing out from it, heard Minos shouting.

"They've slipped away! But they'll make for the Labyrinth. Quick, to the Temple!"

Daedalus and Marlin had grabbed up the lax wings and were buckling on the harnesses.

"You must carry Luane, for my arms are not strong enough to hold her," the Cretan said swiftly. "Now—fly!"

Their wings were already beginning to flap strongly as that weird pseudo-life again awoke in their artificial muscles

Gripping Luane's slight figure in his arms, Marlin ran with the old Cretan along the roof and then leaped wildly upward.

For a terrible moment, he felt himself falling backward. The added weight of the girl seemed pulling him down. Then his wings seemed to flap even more powerfully against the drag, and he soared heavily up and outward from the palace roof.

As he and his burden launched outward with Daedalus into the dark sky, he glimpsed mounted horsemen riding out of a torchlit court of the palace. And Minos and Preyder were in their van.

"We'll reach the Temple ahead of them!" called Daedalus' thin voice over the rush of the wind. "But Minos' guards are already in possession of it!"

THE octagonal white pile of the Temple of Wisdom was looming up close ahead, now. They rushed down toward the roof, Marlin landing heavily and spilling the girl from his arms.

She was up instantly, helping him unharness the wings from his shoulders. Daedalus reached their side.

"Bring the wings with you, for we must not leave them for Minos," he warned.

He lingered a moment to peer down over the edge of the roof. "The guards posted around the Temple did not see us," he said quickly. "If there are none inside, we can get to the Labyrinth and close it forever."

Luane clung to her father in sudden horror. "But there is only one way in which the Labyrinth can be closed forever!"

"And that is the way that must be used, Luane," Daedalus said solemnly. "There's no time for argument! Come quickly!"

They went down the spiral stair, Marlin expecting every moment to hear the horsemen of Minos and Preyder gallop up to the Temple.

The dark halls of the ground level were deserted except for the dead servitors who still lay there. Daedalus rapidly led the way on down the stair, down to that underground, vault-like room in which was the silver door that was entrance to the Labyrinth.

The vault was aflare with torchlight and six Cretan warriors were on guard in it! And the Cretans instantly saw the three as they emerged from the stair.

"Daedalus! The sorcerer is alive!" yelled the first warrior to glimpse them, and ran toward them raising his double-bladed axe.

Marlin thrust the wings he carried into Luane's hand and leaped in front of her and the old scientist.

The axe came down toward him in a savage stroke. But the fine-trained reactions of a fighter-pilot saved the American. He swerved, and as the axe whistled past him he struck viciously with his long dagger.

The blade buried in the Cretan's neck between chin and breast-plate and he went down. Marlin snatched up the heavy axe to face the other Cretans who were rushing forward.

"Back onto the stair!" he yelled over his shoulder to Luane and Daedalus. On the narrow stair, he'd have a slim chance for defense.

But as his raised axe fended the weapons of the attacking warriors, Marlin glimpsed Luane darting past him and past the warriors toward the silver door of the Labyrinth.

Had the Cretan soldiers not hampered each other by the closeness of their attack, Marlin must have died in the first moment. Even as it was, his clumsy use of the axe barely parried the weapons that struck at him.

He knew this unequal battle must end swiftly, and the knowledge was made suddenly more bitter in his mind by the sound of trampling hoofs and shouts that came dimly from above. Preyder and Minos had arrived with their horsemen.

Then a weird, high call floated through the battle-noisy vault. Luane had opened the silver door and was calling that strange cry down into the dark depths of the Labyrinth.

"Gods—*the Minotaurs!*" screamed one of the Cretan warriors in the back of the attackers.

THE monstrous, beast-headed creatures, the hideous things that Minos had bred from man, was pouring up out of the Labyrinth in answer to Luane's summons.

The Cretans, overcome by superstitious horror of these monsters whom all Knossos whispered of and dreaded, tried frantically to flee.

They had no chance. Seven or eight of the ghastly Minotaurs were in the room,

their bull-bellows rocking the walls as they charged till horns ripped into flesh.

"They are here!" yelled a hoarse voice from high up on the stair. "After them!"

A gun cracked, a startlingly anachronistic sound, and a bullet sang off the wall close by Marlin.

The American looked up and saw Preyder, revolver in hand, racing down with Minos toward them at the head of a mass of armored warriors.

"Into the Labyrinth, quick!" panted Daedalus, dragging the American toward the silver door. Luane was calling the Minotaurs.

Then they were in the dark, winding tunnels of the great four-dimensional maze, the shaggy, monstrous horde of the Minotaurs behind them as they ran forward.

Daedalus' strength seemed failing fast. "We must—get to the heart of the Labyrinth," he gasped. "Only there can it be closed permanently."

Torchlight from behind reddened the corridors at their back, and wolf-voices shouting sent fierce echoes through the curving ways.

"Minos has brought scores of his men—they'll search every tunnel until they find us!" Marlin husked.

The Minotaurs were sounding their mind-crushing bellow, seeking fiercely to turn back and give battle to the pursuers. But Daedalus urged his monstrous followers on.

"I shall need them, to close the Labyrinth," he gasped. "We are almost at its heart."

The radiant jewel on Luane's forehead had dimly lighted their way. But now they came from the curving tunnels into a high, round room of stone that seemed the very core of the fantastic maze.

A giant pillar of cylindrical stone blocks rose at the center of this shadowy fane, supporting a curving roof. And it seemed to Marlin's dazed mind that that great, carven pillar was slowly turning.

Daedalus laid his hand upon it.

"This pillar is the keystone of the entire labyrinth," he said. And then, to the Minotaurs, "We must pull out the lowest block of the pillar!"

Obediently, those giant creatures laid hands upon the block that formed the lowest section of the giant column. This basic block was set in a wide groove in the stone floor, so that it might be slid aside to collapse the entire pillar if desired. But even the huge strength of the beast-men could only budge it imperceptibly.

Daedalus spoke hoarsely to Luane. "You must not stay here, daughter. You must guide our friend back out through the tunnels to his own time, before the Labyrinth closes."

She clung to him in an agony of weeping. "No! I stay here to die with you!"

"Die?" echoed Marlin. "What's going to happen? What are you doing?"

"I am closing the Labyrinth in the only way in which it can be permanently closed, by collapsing and destroying its whole maze!" answered the old Cretan solemnly. "When I built it, I made provision to do this should ever the need arise.

"And now the need has arisen! The Labyrinth will perish and with it will perish the plotters who seek to make use of it for evil purposes. And my poor Minotaurs will die here with me, for death will be kinder to them than life."

"And I too die here with you!" Luane repeated wildly. She told Marlin, "Go, make your escape while there is time!"

"How can he escape when he does not know his way through the tunnels?" exclaimed her father. "You must guide him and go with him, Luane."

He held her tear-wet face between his hands. "Death is almost upon me, in any case. The wound I received was truly mortal—the drug I used merely closed it but could not heal it. You must go! And you must take the wings with you, for they may help you to escape when you reach the future world."

HE THRUST them, by a last effort of strength and command, away from him toward one of the tunnels. Sobbingly, Luane led the way into that dark passage.

Marlin glanced back and in the shadows could just see the old Cretan scientist exhorting the giant, faithful Minotaurs who now were sliding the block farther and farther from beneath the pillar.

"There is little time!" came Luane's choked voice. "We must hurry!"

They stumbled around the dizzying quadruple curves of the mysterious maze, the girl leading the way, carrying the lax wings.

And finally, Marlin glimpsed an opening ahead and moonlight! He and the girl, a moment later, stumbled out of the tunnel into the moonlit gorge outside the ruins of Knossos.

"I'm back in my own time, my own world again!" Marlin exclaimed hoarsely to the girl. "A world in which Crete's civilization has been dead for forty centuries."

There came a sudden crashing, prolonged roar from behind them. The whole cliff from whose interior they had just emerged seemed collapsing in upon itself.

Dust rose to veil its broken face, and the roar died away to silence. Luane sobbed wildly.

"The Labyrinth—gone forever!" Marlin husked. "And dead in it, Daedalus and the Minotaurs, and Minos and Preyder!"

There was a sharp cry from somewhere in the distance—a guttural call in German that was answered by other distant voices.

"The Nazis—the collapse of the cliff has attracted their attention and they'll soon be here!" Marlin exclaimed. "We've got to get away at once. If these wings will still work—"

He and Luane buckled them on. A minute later, the pseudo-living pinions began their powerful threshing.

Marlin and the Cretan girl ran along the gorge and leaped, soaring up into the moonlight. He heard a startled exclamation from somewhere below, a wild cry that receded as he and Luane flew on.

THEY soared higher, and Marlin headed southward across the dark, narrow mass of Crete.

"Can we reach Africa with these?" he asked the girl flying beside him.

"I fear not," she answered. "It is too far. Nor do I care for life now. This is not my world."

"Luane, it's going to be our world *together* if we can escape," he told her, his heart in the words.

In the moonlight, the girl flying beside him looked at him and her pale, tear-stained face softened.

They soon were passing over the southern shore of Crete, winging on over the moon-silvered Mediterranean toward distant Africa. But in the next hour, as the flapping wings beat ever more slowly and tiredly, Marlin knew that they would never make that distance.

He scanned the moonlit sea desperately for a ship. And finally, when the tiring wings were letting them fall lower and lower toward the sea, he glimpsed a distant black dot on the silver water.

"If we can reach that ship we're safe, Luane! It must be an Allied craft for there are no others in these waters."

They were less than a mile from the ship and could see it as a destroyer knifing the waves westward, when Marlin's wings went dead upon his back. He shot down like a stone to the water below.

The impact stunned him. He came to himself and found he was floating, supported by Luane.

"I came down after you and dragged you to the surface," she gasped. "But I had to discard our wings before they dragged us both back under."

"Luane, we were seen falling!" Marlin cried joyfully. "That destroyer is turning toward us!"

It was a much-puzzled British naval officer who greeted the American pilot and the strangely-clad girl whom his boat-crew had just pulled out of the sea.

"We saw you jumping," he told Marlin, "but your parachutes didn't seem to be working right and we didn't hear your plane at all."

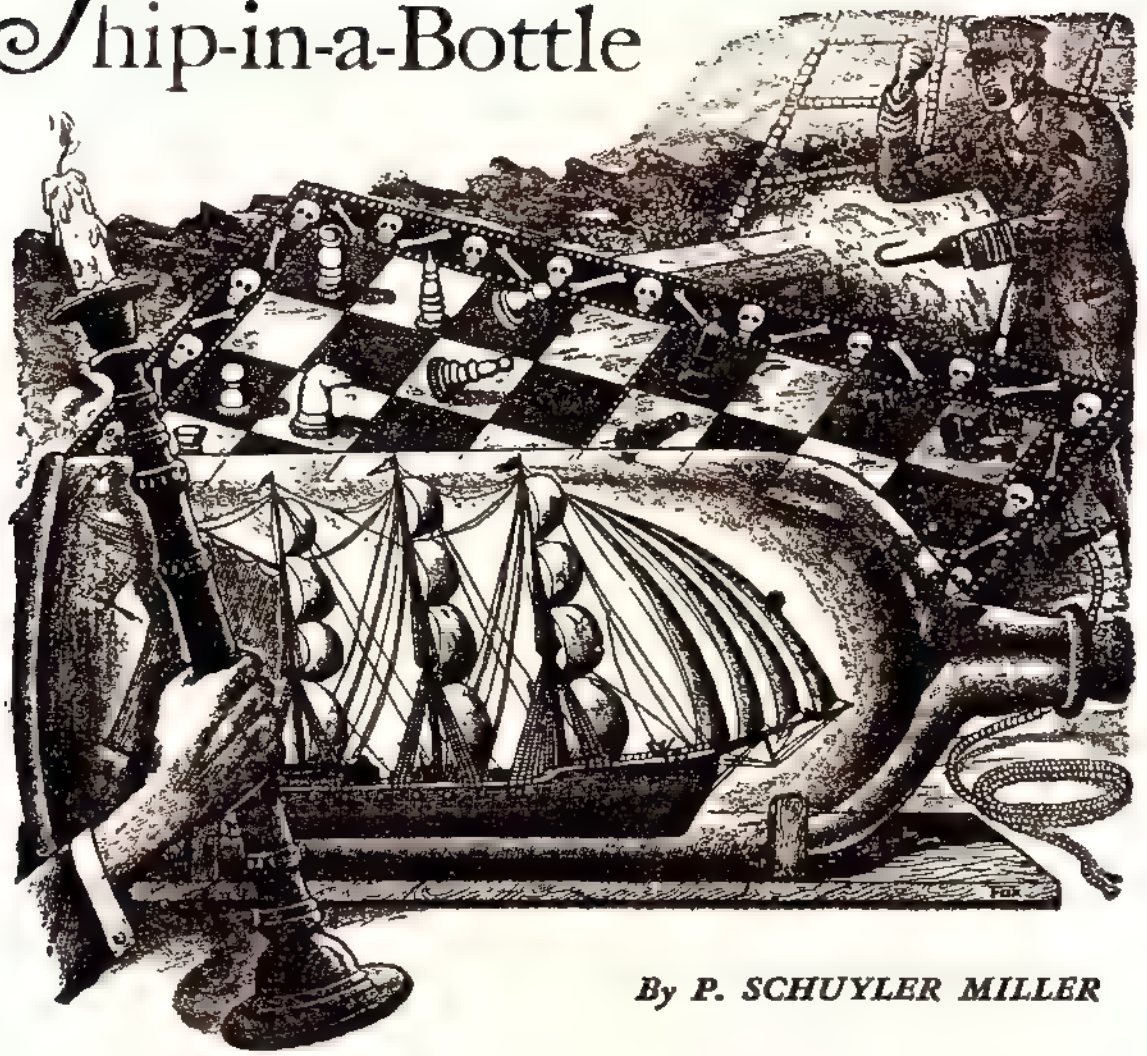
"My plane was hit by a shell over Candia and its motor was dead," Marlin told him. "This girl is a refugee from Crete I was bringing back."

The explanation satisfied the officer. It would satisfy everyone, Marlin knew, and it was the explanation he would always have to give them about what had happened to him.

No one would believe the truth, if he tried to tell it.

Besides, he thought, the explanation was true enough. The girl whom he was holding closely and protectively in his arms was a refugee from Crete, in fact. There was no one who would guess that she came from the Crete, not of 1944, but of four thousand years ago.

Ship-in-a-Bottle



By P. SCHUYLER MILLER

I REMEMBERED the place at once.

I was nearly ten when I first saw it. I was with my father, on one of our exploring trips into the old part of town, down by the river. In his own boyhood it had still been a respectable if run-down district of small shops and rickety old frame houses. He had worked there for a ship chandler until he had money enough to go to college, and on our rambles we would often meet old men and draggled, slatternly women who remembered him. Many is the Saturday afternoon I have spent in the dark corner of some fly-blown bar, a violently colored soft drink untouched in the thick mug before me, while I listened to the entrancing flow of memories these strange acquaintances could draw up out of my father's past.

It was on one of these excursions, shortly before my tenth birthday, that we came upon a street which even he had never seen before. It was little more than a slit between two crumbling warehouses, with a dim gaslamp halfway down its crooked length. It came out, as we discovered, near the end of

Heading by MATT FOX

There were many grimy little shops on those squalid back streets but none so strange as this

the alley which runs behind the Portuguese section along Walnut Street. One side was a solid brick wall, warehouse joined to warehouse for perhaps a hundred yards. On the other was a narrow sidewalk of cracked flagstones, and the windows of a row of shabby shops, most of them empty.

We might have passed it, for we were on our way to the little triangular plot of grass under the old chestnut, where Grand and Beekman come down to the river, and the chess-players meet to squabble amicably over their pipes and their beer of a Saturday night. But as we passed its river end the lamp came on, and its sudden glow in the depths of that black crevice caught my eye. I pulled at my father's coat, and we stopped to look. I wonder now, sometimes, how and by whom that lamp was lit.

The shop door was directly under the light. We might not have seen it otherwise, although I have a feeling it was meant to be seen. Even in the dark it would have had a way of standing out. The flags in front of its door were clean, and the little square panes in its low front window shone. It had a scrubbed look, which grew even more apparent as we hurried toward it past the broken stoops and dingy plate glass of its neighbors.

It was my discovery, and by the rules of the game I was the first to open the door. But I stopped first to look at it, for it was a strange place to find in those surroundings. The street was old, but most of the buildings dated from the turn of the century, before the warehouses had gone up. They had the seedy straightness of the mauve era, corrupted now by the dry rot of poverty and neglect, but this place had a jolly brown look about it that went straight back into my picture-memories of Dickens' London. It was like the stern of a galleon crowded between grimy barges. Its window, as I have said, was low and wide with many little square panes of heavy greenish glass set in lead. The flagstones in front of it were spotless, and the granite curbing with its carved numerals and even the cobbles out to the center of the lane had been scrubbed until they shone.

That, as we saw it first, was Number 52 Manderly Lane.

The street-lamp shone down on its doorstep, but a warmer, mellower light was shining through the wavery old glass of its queer window. I think it was the first oil light that I had ever seen. I know I pressed my nose against the clearest of the little panes to peer inside before I opened the great oaken door. And what I saw was enchantment.

IN THE four years since my mother died and my aunt came to live with us, I had sat with my father in many a grimy little shop on these squalid back streets, and their dirt and stench and meanness no longer concerned me. I had come to expect it and to understand it. It was a part of the setting in which these pinched and tired people lived out their lives. A few of them had come up in the world, as he had, chiefly through political maneuvering or other even more questionable methods, but not many of them had lost the lean, wolfish look of hunger and suspicion which had become a part of them, ingrained as children and nurtured in youth. Those who had it least were among my father's warmest friends.

But this place was different. That was faery. It was the Old Curiosity Shop—it was the shop of Stockton's Magic Egg—it was all the wonderful places I had found in the dark old books in my father's library, rolled up into one and brought alive. It was deep, and broader than seemed possible from outside, with a wide oak counter running from front to back along the left hand side, and a great dim tapestry, full of rich color and magic life, hung on the right hand wall next the door.

The floor was of wide pine planks, sanded white. The ceiling was low and ribbed with heavy beams. And the scent of pine and oak were part of the wonderful rich odor which welled up around me as I opened the big door and stepped inside.

It was a faery odor as the shop was a faery shop. It had all the spices of the Orient in it, and sandalwood, and myrrh. It had mint and thyme and lavender. It had worn leather and burnished copper, and the sharp, clean smell of bright steel. It had things a boy of nine could remember only from his dreams.

Behind the broad counter were cupboards with small-paned glass doors through which

I could dimly make out more wonders than were heaped upon the worn red oak. Three ship's lamps hung from the ceiling, and their yellow light and the light of a thick candle which stood in a huge hammered iron stick on the counter, were all that lighted the place. Their mellow glow flowed over the sleek bales of heavy silk and swatches of brocade and crimson velvet, picking out the fantastic patterns of deep-piled carpets heaped against the wall under the tapestry, and caressing the smooth curves of gloriously shaped porcelains in ox-blood and deep jade. They half hid, half showed me the infinite marvels of an intricately carven screen in ebony and ivory which closed off the rear of the store, and the grotesque drollery of the figures on a massive chest which stood before it, of a family of trollish marionettes dangling against it, and of a set of chessmen which stood, set out for play, on a little taboret of inlay and enamel.

These chessmen my father saw, and went to them at once while I was still moving in sheer wonder from one thing to another, drawing the scent of the place into my lungs, letting my hungry fingers stray over all the strangeness spread out for their enchantment. The men were of ivory, black and red, and of Persian workmanship. I have them yet, and men who should know say that they are very old and fine.

Have I said that as I pushed open the great door a silver bell tinkled somewhere in the depths of the shop? I forgot it at once in the marvels of the place, so it was with a thrill almost of panic that I realized that the proprietor was watching us.

I don't know what I had imagined he would be like. A wizened dwarf, perhaps, wracked over with the years and full of memories. A sleek Eurasian or a Chinese with a beautiful half-caste girl for his slave. Or a bearded gnome of a man as jolly as his shop front and as full of sly magic as its interior. We read much the same sort of thing then that children do now, although my taste in melodrama may have been a bit old-fashioned.

INSTEAD this was a huge man, a brown man with the puckered line of an old scar slashing across his throat and cheek, a man weathered by sea and wind, who would make two of my father and have room enough left for a boy as big as myself. He was of uncertain age—not old certainly, for his shock of hair was wiry and black, and not young either—and dressed in sun-bleached clothes with a pair of rope sandals on his bare feet.

My father looked him over, sizing him up as I had seen him gauge other strangers in these parts before opening conversation. He was satisfied, apparently, for he inquired the price of the chessmen and in doing so brought another surprise.

I suppose that I expected a rolling bass from so big a man—a man so obviously a sailor, and one who from his bearing had been an officer, accustomed to bellowing his commands above the roar of wind and sea. But it was small and soft and rasping, as if he had swallowed it and could not bring it up again. It made my backbone creep.

"They are not for sale," he whispered.

I had heard that gambit used before, and was rather surprised when my father did not follow it up in the traditional way, but he turned instead to survey the contents of the counter and the shelves behind it. The shopkeeper lifted the iron candlestick and followed as he stooped to examine a curious footstool made from an elephant's foot, or fingered a creamy bit of lace.

"The boy has a birthday soon," my father said casually. I was listening, you may be sure, with all my ears. "Perhaps you have something that he'll like."

The man looked at me. He had black eyes —hard eyes, like some of the bits of carved stone on his shelves. His face was cut by hard lines that made deep-bitten gutters from his hooked nose to the corners of his wide, cruel mouth. But his voice was as soft and rustling as his own fine silk.

"Let him look for himself," he said. "Here's a candle for him. And while he looks I'll play you for the men."

If my father was startled, he never showed it. He had learned control of his face and tongue as he had been taught control of his quick, hard body, of necessity and long ago in these very streets. "Good," he said, and drew from his vest pocket the gold piece he carried for luck. It was a Greek coin, I think, or even older. "Call for white."

The coin spun in the lamplight, and I

heard the man's half-whisper: "Heads." It fell on the wooden floor, and my father let him pick it up. "Heads," he said softly, "but I have a liking for the black."

THEY drew up chairs beside the little table, and I on my part soon forgot them in the wonders which the candlelight revealed. I stood for a long time, I remember, examining the tapestry which stretched all the length of the farther wall—its fabric darkened by age, but full of life and color depicting a history of a mythology which I could not and still cannot place. I grew tired of it, and had a moment's fright as I caught the empty eyes of a row of leering masks watching me from the rafters above it, then I turned back to the clutter on the long counter and began to rummage through it for whatever I might find. The cupboards tempted me, but it was with a queer sensation that I heard the proprietor's husky voice: "Go on, boy—open them."

It was a long game, I think. I was so full of the strangeness of everything, and so desirous of making exactly the right choice in all that mass of untold wonders, that I might never in my life have decided what thing I wanted most. And then I found the ship.

I am sure now it was chance—pure chance—or if it was fate, a fate more far-reaching than anything we know. I had opened cupboard after cupboard, holding the heavy candlestick high to see or setting it down on the counter behind me to fondle and explore. There were deep drawers under the cupboards, and more under the counter, and I hunted through those, finding new wonders every moment—trays in which gaudy butterflies had been inlaid in tropic woods, trinkets of gold so soft and fine that I could scar it with my nail, jewels of a hundred sorts, and the mummies of strange small animals. One cupboard seemed to stick, and when I pulled it open the whole wall came with it, leaving a paneled niche almost five feet deep. In it, set in an iron cradle, was a great glass bottle—a perfect sphere of thin green glass—and in it was the ship.

It was an old ship, a square-rigger, perfect in every detail. Most ship models that I had seen in the waterfront shops were small and rather crude, stuffed into rum bottles or casual flasks which had happened to come the maker's way, with more ingenuity than pride of craftsmanship. This ship was different. Where the routine ship-in-a-bottle bowled along under full sail, heeling a bit with the force of the imaginary gale that stretched its starched or varnished canvas, this ship lay becalmed with her sails slack and the sun beating down on her naked decks. There was not a ripple in the glassy sea in which she lay. The tiny figures of seamen, no bigger than the nail of my little finger, stood morosely at their tasks, and on the bridge a midget captain stared up at me and shook in my face a threatening arm which ended in a tiny, shining hook.

I knew then that I wanted that ship more than I had ever wanted anything in all my life before. It wasn't the flawless craftsmanship of the thing, or the cunning art which had sealed it within that seemingly flawless globe of glass. It was because—and I say this after thirty years—it was because I had deep in my child's soul the conviction that this ship was somehow real, that she sailed somewhere in a real sea, and that if only she were mine I could somehow find a way of getting aboard her and sailing away to adventures beyond the dreams of any boy in all the world.

I turned to call my father. The game was over, and he stood, an oddly thoughtful expression on his lean face, staring down at the final pattern of men. For he had won. The chessmen were his. But the shopkeeper was looking not at him but at me, and although the light was behind him I did not like at all what I thought was in his face.

I stepped quickly backward. The candle tilted and hot grease splashed my wrist. I think my elbow hit the open cupboard door as I jerked it back, for I felt it give and heard it close. Then with tigerish speed the brown man was across the shop, leaning across the counter. He pulled it open—and there was no ship there.

I thought there was a threat in his strange hushed voice. "Well, boy," he whispered, "your father's beaten me. What do you want?"

I set the candle down between us and backed away. I wanted nothing more at that moment than to get out into the street again, where there were lights and people and my

father. All the wonder of the place was swept away in an emotion that was as much guilt as fear, as though I had pried into forbidden things—for that was in his voice.

"N-nothing, sir!" I told him. "Nothing at all."

"Nothing?" It was my father. "Nonsense, Tom. Don't be a fool. This is a wonderful place. I've done this gentleman out of some very valuable chessmen, and we must give him his chance at us. Now—what do you want?"

It was queer how his being there changed everything. There was no more fear and there was no reason at all for feeling guilty. A kind of defiance grew up in me in their stead, and I looked straight into those hard black eyes and answered.

"I'd like a ship, I think—a ship in a bottle."

That's almost all, except that I got a ship. I had asked for one, and my father, feeling rather odd at having won so valuable a prize, insisted that I choose. I made a long business of it, hunting over all the shelves and through all the cupboards, and at last I chose a frigate that as I realize now was a masterpiece for all its lifeless, straining sails and plaster wake. But there was no becalmed clipper with sun-drenched crew, hung in a green bubble as broad as my arms could span. And for a good many years, after we had moved to another town and I had found a new school and new friends, and eventually work, I wondered why . . .

I KNEW the street at once when I saw it again.

I had been looking for it, as a matter of fact—not actively, but in a casual sort of way as I walked the old streets along which I had trotted with my father thirty years before. They still played chess of a summer night in the little park where Beekman meets the river, but the players I had known were gone. People in those parts do not forget so easily, though, and I bought a drink here, and two or three in another place, and talked of old times and agreed that the new ones were decadent and drab. It was near midnight of a glorious night full of stars, so I turned naturally to the river front and strolled along the empty street with only my shadow for company, listening to the slow echo of my footsteps and thinking of nothing at all but the night.

The street lamp threw a band of light across my way, a little brighter than the starlight. At the same moment I stepped down from the curb and felt uneven cobbles underfoot, and somehow the two combined to break through my revery and bring a memory up through the veil of years. I looked up, and it was there.

In thirty years the lane had grown dingier and darker, and the patch of scrubbed flagging stood out even brighter than it had that night when I was nearly ten. One of the warehouses had burned some years before, and the brick escarpment which walled the alley on the left was crumbling and broken with the black bones of charred timbers standing up against the night. The houses I passed were dead and boarded up; the shop fronts were broken, and the doors of three or four sagged open. But as I came to Number 52 it was as though nothing had changed. Nothing—in thirty years.

There was the same big window of heavy, leaded panes so old and flawed that it was hard to see through them. There was the same mellow lamplight shining out into the street, and the same great door with its massive iron latch. And as I had thirty years before, I opened it and stepped into the shop.

The little bell tinkled as the door opened—a silver bell, it seemed, deep inside the shop. My footsteps rang on the scrubbed pine floor, and the light of the three ship's lamps shone on the great tapestry that covered the right-hand wall, and on the counter and the cupboards to the left.

Under the center lamp, close beside the counter, was a little table of inlay and red enamel, and on it were a chessboard and men—ivory, black and red. I looked up from them, as I had thirty years before, and he stood there.

I think he knew me. I resemble my father, and it may have been that, but I think he knew me. As it happens I am not my father, and the game we played that night was a very different one.

"You are looking for something, sir?" It was the same soft voice, small and husky, trapped in his scarred throat. I had heard it often in my dreams during those thirty

years. And he was the same, even to the clothes he wore. I could swear to it.

He repeated his question, and it was as though those thirty years had dissolved and it was a boy of nine-going-on-ten who stood half frightened, half defiant, and answered him: "I'd like to see a ship, I think. A ship in a bottle."

He might have been carved out of wood like one of his own fetishes. But his voice was not quite so soft and ingratiating as I remembered it. "I am sorry, sir. We have no ships."

I had changed the opening of the game, and the play was changing too. Very well; it was my move. "I'll look around, if you don't mind. I may see something that I like."

He took up the iron candlestick from the counter beside the little table. It looked smaller than I remembered, but then I had been smaller thirty years before. "Do you play chess, sir?" he inquired softly. "I have some very unusual men here — very old. Very fine. Will you look at them?"

THERE seemed to be a kind of pressure in the atmosphere, a web of intangible forces gathering round me, trying to push me back into the pattern of a generation before. I found myself standing over the table, holding one of the ivory men. So far as I could tell they were identical with those my father had won. I had them still at home, all but one knight which had been lost.

"Thank you," I said. "I have a very fine set of my own—much like these of yours. They are Persian, I've been told."

I am not sure that he heard me. He stood holding the candlestick over his head, watching my face with those stony eyes. "I will play you for these men," he whispered.

"You must be confident," I said. "They are valuable."

He tried to smile, a quick grimace of that hard, thin mouth and a puckering of the scar across his jowl. "I trust my skill, sir," he replied. "Will you risk yours?"

I looked at him then, long and hard. That square brown face was no older than it had been thirty years before; the eyes were as bright and hard and—ageless. I began to wonder then, as I think my father wondered suddenly as he rose the winner, what might be my forfeit if I should lose. But it was the defiant boy of ten who blurted out: "Yes —I'll play you. But not for these chessmen. I'll play you for a ship."

"There is no ship here," he repeated. "But if there is something else . . . ?"

"I'll see," I said. I turned to the counter and glanced over the hodge-podge of curios which littered it. They were less wonderful than they had seemed to a child who was not quite ten, trash mingled with fine workmanship and beautiful materials. I opened the door of a cupboard, and it seemed to me that the objects on the shelves were exactly as I had replaced them thirty years before. I pulled open a drawer, and the same colors and patterns of grotesque shells and gaudy butterflies came welling up in my memory.

I turned to him then and took the iron candlestick. It seemed to complete a kind of circuit in me—to drop a missing piece into the jigsaw that was shaping in my mind. Time melted away around me, and I was moving down the line of cupboards, opening one after another, touching the things in them quickly with my fingers as I held the candle high. This time the brown man was close beside me. And then I knew suddenly that this was it. I tugged at the cupboard door, and it stuck. I tugged again, and I thought that he had stopped breathing. And then something—chance, was it, or a kind of fate?—something gave me the trick, the little twist to the handle as I pulled, and the cupboard swung out on noiseless hinges exposing the alcove—and the ship.

It was the same—and it was not the same. The listless sails seemed browner and some of them were furled as though the captain had given up hope of wind. The deck was bleached whiter by the tropic sun, and the paint had chipped and blistered on the trim hull. The garments which the tiny crewmen wore were worn and shabby, and there were fewer men that I remembered. But the midget captain stood on his bridge as he had stood thirty years before, eyes fixed grimly on the empty sky, staring at me and through me. This time his hands were clasped behind his back, left fist clasped on his right wrist just above the shining hook. This time he seemed a little less erect, a little older than before.

I had a firm grip on the iron candlestick

as I turned to the proprietor, for I did not like what was in his face. It was gone in an instant. "I had forgotten this, sir," he said. "I will play."

AND then it seemed that there was another hand on mine, pushing my fingers down into the pocket of my vest, bringing out the same uneven little disc of gold which my father had tossed to call the play on another night.

His eyes went down to it, then back to mine. "If you are agreeable, sir," he said, "I am accustomed to the black."

I am not a great player, or even a very good one. As I set out the red men on the squares of the board, the same question rose again in the back of my mind. What was the price of my defeat? What was the prize he coveted, which I could give him—him, whose choice was always black?

I think that two of us played the white game that night. I think he knew it, for his seamed brown face was pale as he bent over the board. The game went quickly; there was never any doubt in my mind of the next move, and there seemed a grim certainty about his. I cannot tell you now what moves we made, or what the end-play was, but I knew suddenly that his king was trapped, and he knew too, for as I reached out to touch my queen his face was murderous.

Board and men went over on the floor as he lunged to his feet, but I was watching him and I sprang back over my toppled chair, sweeping up the heavy candlestick. As he lurched toward me, I hurled it at his head.

Was there a web of unseen forces spun around us, drawing us together after those thirty years? Was it chance, or fate? I could hardly have missed, but I did, and the iron stick crashed past him into the great green bubble with its imprisoned ship.

For one endless moment his iron fingers tore at my throat. For one moment I was beating blindly at his face with both fists, struggling to break away. For one moment he raged down at me, his face contorted with fear and rage, hissing strange syllables in that husky whisper. Then there welled up all around us the surge and roar of the sea, and I heard wind strumming through taut cordage, and the creak of straining blocks, and the snap of filling sails. I heard a great roaring voice shouting orders, and the answering cries of men. And something vast and black rushed past me through the gloom, the smell of the sea was rank in my nostrils, and the lights went out in a howl of rising wind—and the pressure of iron fingers on my throat was gone.

When I could breathe again I found my matches and lit the ship's lamp which hung from the beam overhead. The green glass globe was powder. The ship was gone. And the thing that lay sprawled at my feet among the scattered chessmen, its clothes in tatters and its flesh raked as if by the barnacles of a ship's bottom—its throat ripped as if by one slashing blow of a steel claw—that thing had been too long undersea to be wholly human.

The Inverness Cape

By AUGUST DERLETH

MORDECAI PIERSON was a mean, grasping man in his late forties. He kept a small pawnshop off Piccadilly, and in that had something in common with his aged uncle. That was the only thing, however, the two men had in common. The old man, Thaddeus Pierson, was a kindly, generous soul with a harmless passion for collecting oddments of one kind or another. He was of independent means, and could afford to indulge both his capacity for charity and his desire to increase his collection with becoming modesty.

Mordecai always believed that the various baubles in his shop were of more monetary value than his uncle's hodge-podge. After all, when it came down to it, a chair once used to murder someone was nothing more than a chair, and, if anything, it had less value than a chair which had not been so

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

used. And who would want a rusty knife which was still stained with blood? And, for that matter, what good was an old book on witchcraft?

However, Mordecai, who was too parsimonious to buy one, did envy old Thaddeus Pierson his Inverness cape. Apart from the old man's money, that was the only thing he envied him. Mordecai knew very well he would get most of the old man's money when he died, but from things Thaddeus had said, there was more than just a reasonable doubt about the Inverness cape. For it was not really the old man's in the sense that it was part of his wardrobe; it belonged to his collection, and at first Thaddeus was annoyingly mysterious about it. Partly because of the old man's reticence, Mordecai was all the more determined to gain possession of the cape, for it was such a magnificent piece of work, a heavy black, lined in a kind of deep gray satin, with thickly braided cords of red silk to support the clasp at the neck. Hand-wrought, clearly, and made to order.

Mordecai went every Sunday to call on his uncle. There was nowhere else he cared to go, since most of the other places to which he might have gone cost him a little more and his uncle usually asked him to stay for whichever meal was closest to his coming—usually dinner; by timing his visits with care, Mordecai thus saved the price of his dinner. This was so regular a procedure that he could count on this weekly saving, and duly kept a record of it.

Mordecai's visits, incredible as it might seem, did give old Thaddeus Pierson a modicum of pleasure most of the time. For Mordecai always pretended a great interest in his uncle's collection, and his pretense was enlivened by the tantalizing possibility that sooner or later he might lead the old man to divulge some details about the Inverness cape. He could remember that first night when he had showed it to him, how the old man had gone proudly into that vast room opening off his chamber, talking with an animation that brought a glow of pleasure to his rounded cheeks.

"My boy, tonight I have to show you the greatest treasure ever to come into my poor house. It is not too much to say that it is the very heart of my collection," he had said.

Mordecai, knowing of the old man's fascination for the macabre, had expected nothing less than the skeleton of an executed murderer or something akin. His first reaction at sight of the Inverness cape was one of surprise, but this was quickly superseded by an intense, avidly possessive pleasure, complicated by an immediate envy. And his initial reaction, too, had had about it something alien, something that startled him; for, as he stood gazing down in the none too brightly lighted room at the rich folds of that garment, he had had the curious impression that the cape had moved of itself, as if it had life—but of course, he had touched it, and the garment had *presence*. Ah, but he would be a striking figure of a man with that beautiful cape swinging from his shoulders!

THE thought had haunted him ever since that time, and now, every Sunday when he visited his old uncle, he paid a visit to the cape, too. He was like all small souls who, living their circumscribed lives in tiny orbits ruled by grasping natures, easily become obsessed by trifles, which, in the comparative emptiness of their lives, soon come to assume an importance equal to life itself. Whenever Mordecai thought of Thaddeus, he instinctively thought of the Inverness cape, too; it had never been so of any other piece in the old man's collection of macabre souvenirs, but the cape was in truth a masterpiece, just as Thaddeus had said, "the heart" of his collection.

And every Sunday, when the collection moved into the limelight, Mordecai did his best to turn the conversation to the Inverness cape, with a single-mindedness that amounted to sheer devotion. Old Thaddeus Pierson was not above yielding from time to time, just as he could not resist a modest pride in taking pleasure at his nephew's gloating upon the cape where it lay spread out for the inspection of all who cared to see it.

So, by and by, Mordecai discovered enough to whet his appetite for more.

The Inverness cape had once been the property of a mass-murderer. Mordecai tantalized himself with the thought that it might have been Jack the Ripper or Troppmann, but it was manifest even on cursory examination that the cape post-dated those celebrated gentlemen. Mordecai, who had no superstitions, tried to imagine the look of the un-

known murderer about his grisly business, certainly wearing the cape. He could see him slinking down the dark alleys and byways of Soho and Wapping, of Limehouse and Whitechapel—yes, indeed, the haunts of Jack the Ripper, and of his poor victims at the oldest calling in the world!

The cape had been especially made by an ancient foreigner in a little shop in the region of the East India Docks. Into it had been woven "more than cloth," said old Thaddeus Pierson enigmatically.

Morecai was feverish with excitement. "What in the world do you mean, Uncle Thaddeus? 'More than cloth!' What a fascinating thought! What more?"

But the old man had shaken his head. "There are things it is better not to know. You are a weak man, Mordecai; you are weak in flesh and weak in spirit. Truth to tell—I should destroy it, but I am weak in that, too."

"Destroy it!" cried Mordecai, almost in anguish at the thought. "Destroy that beautiful garment? You must be out of your mind, Uncle!"

"No, no, far from it. Believe me, it is an evil thing."

"Oh, come; come—the port was not that strong."

The old man had but smiled. And what a smile! How enigmatic! How tantalizing! Oh, it was maddening! On that occasion, Mordecai had indeed been very close to learning what he sought to know.

He came as close on another, but failed to interpret what he heard properly. The old man had been reminiscing that night, and had himself turned to the subject of the Inverness cape.

"Some of those foreigners have more than human craft, I believe," he said. "Take that fellow who wove the Inverness cape that brute Woldner wore—I got the cape from him, you know," he went on, quite as if he had told this to Mordecai before, "and he told me strange things about it. He said he had woven part of Woldner's soul into it, indeed he had! And the thing had a life of its own. It ought not to be worn, but once worn, its wearer is committed to a way of evil from which the cape will not let him escape."

Mordecai had made the mistake of interrupting him at this point, and, moreover, of casting doubt upon his tale. The old man recovered himself, made a rousing joke at the expense of the story he had just told, and lapsed into a peroration upon the intrinsic value of a jeweled knife he had that day acquired from a merchant who assured him it had been used by an Egyptian prince to dispatch a faithless wife. Try as he would, Mordecai could not get another word out of his uncle on that occasion; the old man was even guilty of a manifest reluctance to let him look at the cape once more, but finally yielded to his importunings, and led the way into the room which housed the collection.

There was the cape, as always, almost sentient under his eyes. Mordecai laid his hand upon it and stroked it as he might have stroked a cat. It was uncanny, but the satin lining seemed actually to respond, to grow warm under his touch.

WHEN he left the house that night he had the name of the cape's former owner, and he lost no time in looking up Woldner. But Woldner's case was disappointingly ordinary—just a series of petty, unimportant little murders: a policeman, an old beggar, a woman, a little child—revolting, in short, and murder committed apparently simply for the pleasure of it. But there was a curious note in the story—the cape had been made for Woldner as a "peace offering" from an old enemy, for Woldner had apparently at one time been a respected officer in the service of His Majesty, assigned to duty at Delhi, where he had mortally offended one of His Majesty's Indian subjects, who, upon coming to London shortly after Woldner's retirement, had made himself known to Woldner and presented him with an Inverness cape woven especially for him. The point was made because Woldner had been identified by the cape and so apprehended.

The accounts Mordecai read were all somewhat garbled, subject, no doubt, to police censorship, but they were all agreed that Woldner had emphatically disclaimed responsibility for the crimes, crying out that he had been made to commit them, but failing to name the source of such heinous pressure on him. His disclaimers of responsibility had not saved him; the evidence was clear; he had died for his crimes. The press had made a modest todo about his fine record in India.

Mordecai told all this to his uncle when next he called, and it had a most disturbing effect on the old man. Thaddeus looked sharply at him several times and asked finally whether it had not occurred to him that the Inverness cape, far from being a peace offering, had instead been something far different—"something malevolent, in fact, and planned to be by that fellow whose brother Woldner had had shot?"

"Oh, so that was it! I wondered. There was just that business about an 'old enemy' or something of the sort. Why did he have his brother shot?"

"In the line of duty," said the old man.

"It was the same fellow who wove the cape, then?"

"Of course. Who else could it be?"

"And it would seem that they were the best of friends thereafter," mused Mordecai. "Wasn't the Indian among the mourners?"

"I believe he was."

There was some oblique talk, but little more from the old man.

This was, in fact, almost the last Mordecai was to get from his uncle, for on his next visit, which was to prove his last, he came into the house just as the old man sank to his bed, the victim of an aging heart which had long given him trouble. Mordecai immediately telephoned for a doctor, but it seemed manifest that the old man would not last long enough. He lay there, his eyes closed, breathing stertorously, his face coloring up to indicate a certain amount of asphyxiation. As he stood there, thinking of his uncle's dying, Mordecai's natural avariciousness pushed boldly to the surface, and instantly he thought: If I am carrying that Inverness cape or something—the doctor'll think I came with it on; nobody'll know the difference!

And, quick as the thought struck him, Mordecai darted into the room of the collection—he did not even take the time to put on the light; he knew his way so well—snatched up the Inverness cape, and slipped back into his uncle's bedroom.

BUT now the old man's eyes were open, and, seeing Mordecai with the cape in his hands, he opened them wider still and gasped, "Mordecai—put it back. Destroy it. For the love of God, don't wear it! I beg you— If once . . . you wear it . . . you will never escape its psychic forces—it will rule you; it will destroy you . . . Mordecai, believe me; I know; it was given me . . . condition I destroyed it before I died. There is sorcery in it—Mordecai, *it . . . is . . . alive!*" But this final effort was too much for his overtired heart, and the old man fell back into unconsciousness, just as the doctor came in the front door, and was pronounced dead shortly thereafter.

Mordecai left his uncle's house that Sunday evening with the Inverness cape swinging about his shoulders. And what a grand feeling it was, too! What a conviction of grandeur and majesty it gave him! If anyone could have seen him at the moment he descended the steps to the street, he would have looked with astonishment at his beaming countenance; for Mordecai was in seventh heaven at the success of his bold move, without being in the least troubled by the knowledge that, technically, he had stolen the cape against his uncle's wishes.

Once safely at home with his prize, he took it off and gloated over it, drawing all the shades of his spare apartment, and holding the Inverness cape across his knees, stroking and fondling it as if it were a creature for whose existence he was responsible. Indeed, the cape seemed to bring new life into his home. There was a feeling of resurgent life-force strong in Mordecai, something he had not felt for years; he was no longer conscious of his parsimoniousness, but only of a sense of infinite well-being, as if, by becoming the possessor of this garment, he had come into a fortune. But, of course, he *was* coming into Uncle Thaddeus's modest fortune; so he had every right to feel pleased with life.

In the morning Mordecai had a caller—a little wizened old man with a swarthy skin who identified himself speedily as the maker of the Inverness cape and politely asked Mordecai to surrender the garment.

"My uncle gave it to me, I am sorry to say," said Mordecai with icy steadiness and unflinching eyes.

The old man looked his disbelief. "Perhaps you would not object to calling on me tonight, Mr. Pierson? Perhaps we could come to some agreement about the cape? I could always make you another, sir."

It was on the tip of his tongue to dismiss the fellow, but prudence intervened. Mor-

decai said pleasantly that he saw no reason why he should not call. On the threshold his visitor turned and said he would be obliged to Mordecai if Mordecai did not wear the cape.

"I shall do as I see fit," said Mordecai shortly.

But in the evening he did make his way by cab to the out-of-the-way corner of the East India Docks where the Indian had his place of business. He wore the cape. Had he not been in the cab and traveling swiftly, he might never have reached his destination, for he caught sight of a bobby and was suddenly possessed of the most extraordinary sense of rage which had not subsided until the cab had gone so far that the shining helmet was lost to sight in the rainy night.

HIS visit, unfortunately for Mordecai, bore no further fruit. Despite the Indian's pleading that he be allowed to weave an Inverness cape especially for him, Mordecai grew every instant more stubborn; he must have this cape, or none.

The Indian urged; he could make an exact duplicate, except for one thing.

"Ah!" cried Mordecai, seizing upon the point. "Then it would not be the same."

"No, sir."

"How would it differ?"

"*Your* cape, sir, would be entirely of cloth."

"And isn't this one?"

The Indian shook his head, and his black eyes stared almost insolently into Mordecai's.

"No, thank you," said Mordecai, and turned on his heel.

"Sir, I must have that cape before it does more harm. And it does not like remorse or weakness."

"Good evening!"

Mordecai stepped out into the wet night, his cape almost caressing his body, making him to feel twenty years younger, filling him with a kind of exultance and pride, not only of possession, but of something more. Behind him, in the little shop, the Indian made himself ready to follow and recover the cape, which, he had inferred plainly, to Mordecai's irritation and sense of outrage, he meant to destroy.

Mordecai set out in a lordly stride down the East India Dock Road. He disliked the neighborhood, and meant to take the underground back to his lodgings, but at the moment he was some distance from a station, there was no cab in sight, and he had to walk. What a pity, he reflected, that there were so few people about to see him in all this grandeur! The night was damp with slowly shifting vapors; house-fronts, street-lamp posts, railings—all gleamed yellowly in the night, giving off a kind of sheen; and overhead the night sky was eerie with the glow of London in the thickening fog.

Small wonder, in view of the increasing density of the atmosphere, that Mordecai's pursuer lost him from time to time.

How good the cape felt, how warm it was! reflected Mordecai as he strode along, feeling like a little king. How its weight pressed upon his shoulders, how the clasp and the slip-knotted cord seemed to snuggle close to his neck! Mordecai walked fast, so that the cape might billow out behind him a little, and so give him the aspect of flight—as if he were a great bird, or a bat, or Mr. Conrad Veidt performing on the stage in the role of Count Dracula.

Ah, but his little mind was occupied! And how happy he was! And how well for him that he knew this brief happiness, because suddenly, horribly, incredibly, something happened to Mordecai Pierson!

He saw a policeman.

The policeman was alone, standing at the entrance to a dark alley, just under a feebly-glowing light, trying in vain to read something he had written into his notebook.

MORDECAI came to a dead stop. Inside him there rolled up a great rage against that helmetted fellow, an insane fury which caused him to tremble and shake with its vehemence, and on his back he felt his Inverness crawl and crouch, as if about to spring. He took a step forward, and another—and then he could not hold himself another instant. He launched himself upon the unsuspecting policeman, closed his wiry hands about the poor fellow's throat, and pressed hard, with a terrible, animal fury.

When he got up, the policeman was dead.

Mordecai stepped back, breathing fast. He looked all around him. No one had seen. Instantly he faded into the fog, a great sense of exultation leaping within him. He ran a little way, but thought this unseemly, and settled down to a walk.

He had gone scarcely thirty rods before the enormity of what he had done came upon him. In God's name! he thought to himself, it must have been a dream! But cries were being raised behind him, and he knew it was no dream. What had taken possession of him? What malevolence had raised itself within him?

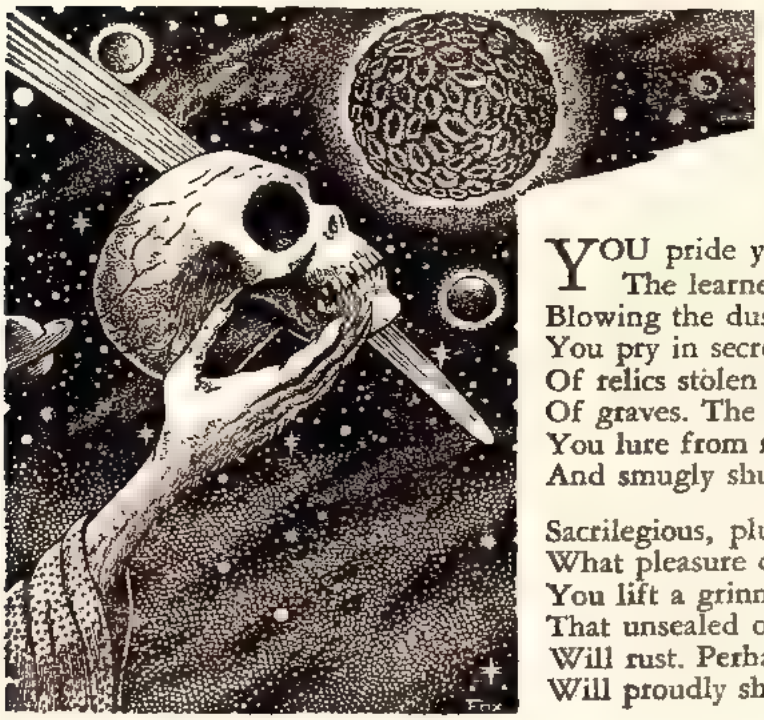
JUST at that moment, he saw walking ahead of him, an old beggar.

Once again he paused, once again he felt rising inside him a hot, bestial rage, and he felt the cape closing protectingly around him, almost as if pushing him a little, urging him fitfully forward. But at the same time, something rang and echoed dimly in his memory. He seemed to remember a pattern somewhere, a mad, homicidal pattern of Indian vengeance, of horrible murder and retribution, and he heard his uncle's despairing voice crying out on the threshold of death, *"Mordecai—it is alive!"*

The pattern was Woldner's—he had killed first a policeman, then an old beggar, then—no, no, great God! The cape—it was the cape! With a terrible cry, Mordecai flung himself backward and away from the beggar, for whose scrawny neck his frenzied fingers were already reaching, and, gasping, reached for the clasp at his neck.

But something was there before him. It was the knotted cord, and of a sudden, even as he reached to free himself from the hellish garment once so caressing about his shoulders, the cape seemed to slide up his body, enclosing him, enveloping him, and the knot at his neck grew tighter, the cord grew taut, the cape moved up, over his head, stifling his gasping cries.

In a few horrible moments Mordecai's iconoclastic avarice had been rewarded. Even as the Indian came pattering out of the fog, he fell heavily to the pavement and rolled off the curb, and the Inverness cape flowed open and settled its folds almost lovingly about him, spreading itself over his prostrate body like something alive like some great beast of prey waiting complacently for its next victim.



Grave Robbers

By MARVIN MILLER

YOU pride yourselves as archaeologists,
The learned ones who speak in muted tones,
Blowing the dust from prehistoric bones.
You pry in secrets, making tiresome lists
Of relics stolen from the somber gloom
Of graves. The man of yesteryear, in sleep,
You lure from rolling plains and kivas' deep,
And smugly shut him in a show-case tomb.

Sacrilegious, plunder-seeking fools,
What pleasure do you feel when from the ground
You lift a grinning skull? Your futile tools
That unsealed once . . . forever this, his mound,
Will rust. Perhaps a scientist from Mars
Will proudly show *your* skulls to other stars!

Revolt of the Trees

By ALLISON V. HARDING

Before you go thinking that a tree is one of the lowest forms of life—listen . . .!

"WHAT is a tree?" said Professor Hodges of Brooks Agricultural College. "Why simply a low-grade form of plant life slowed down to infinitesimal movement of growth too small for us to see or measure."

Harvey "The Hunch" Winslow, reporter for the *Western News-Chronicle* nodded boredly.

"That's fine, Professor, but I don't see the angle. I'm supposed to write this article for our Sunday supplement. We're writing it for people who like trees. You don't seem to think much more of them than I do."

Professor Hodges waved his hand.

"Young man, it isn't that at all. It's simply that a tree is one of the lowest forms of life . . . merely a perennial woody plant characterized by its single main stem. There is some beauty, yes. A certain stately dignity about trees but no excitement, no drama, no what you call 'angle.'"

Winslow got up muttering half to himself.

"I knew I should have quit before I took this rotten assignment."

"What?" said Hodges leaning forward and cupping one hand to his ear.

"Oh nothing," replied Winslow in his normal voice. "Thanks, Professor."

Outside the teachers' residence, Winslow slammed his battered fedora on the back of his head and started disconsolately down the street.

"Me trying to do a beauty and the beast. Me, the best reporter *Western* ever had and they stick me on a Sunday supplement story on trees." Harvey Winslow grimaced. "I wonder if there's a bar around this place."

Where there's a will, there's a way, and Winslow finally found his way to one of those small hidden little taverns that crop up even in an obscure suburb like Brooks. After the fourth drink, Harvey leaned forward and leered at the barkeep.

"Do you like trees?" he said, drawing his lips back in a near snarl.

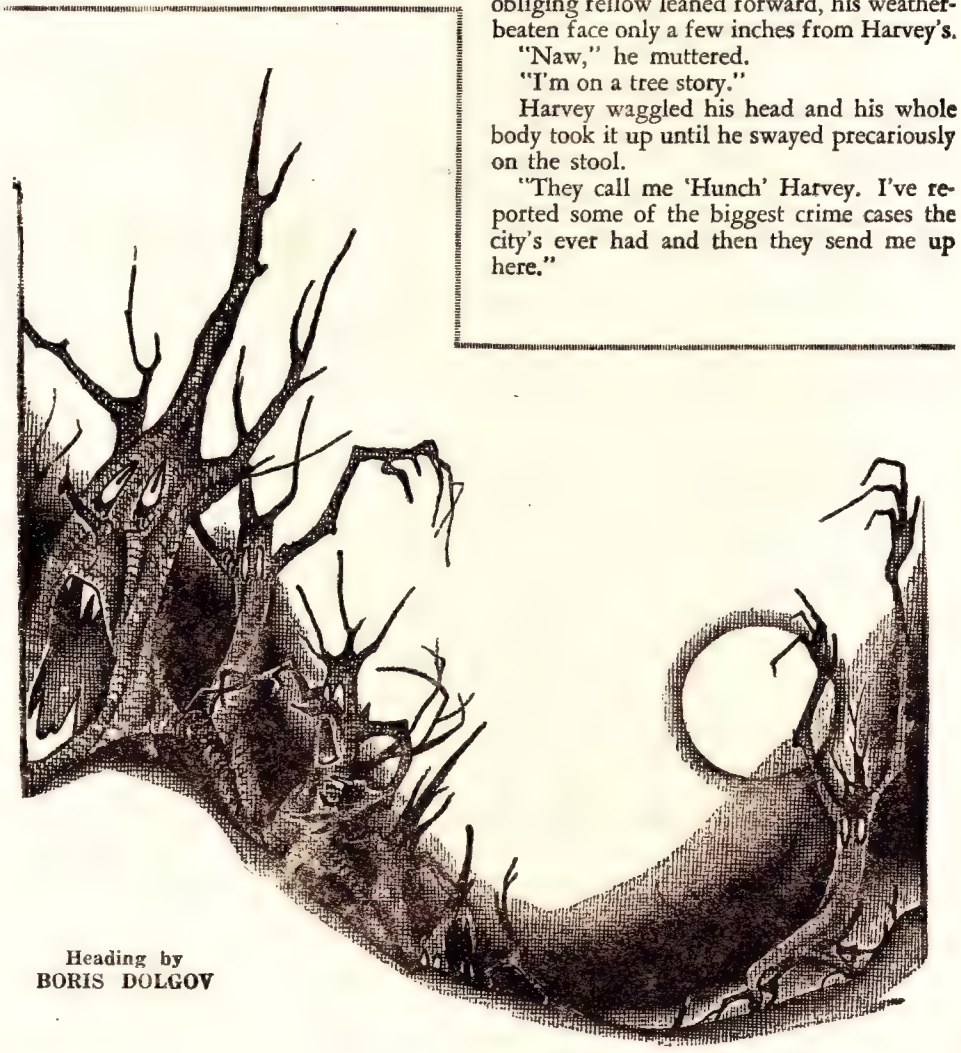
In the manner of barkeeps for ages, this obliging fellow leaned forward, his weather-beaten face only a few inches from Harvey's.

"Naw," he muttered.

"I'm on a tree story."

Harvey waggled his head and his whole body took it up until he swayed precariously on the stool.

"They call me 'Hunch' Harvey. I've reported some of the biggest crime cases the city's ever had and then they send me up here."



Heading by
BORIS DOLGOV

"Yeah," said the barkeep disinterestedly.

"Give me another drink of that furniture polish.

THE way Harvey felt an hour later, the furniture-polish line was no longer a joke. It was a real possibility. He left the bar, to be sure, mainly under his own power but guided and directed by a couple of fellow habitués who were either immune to the furniture-polish liquor or too smart to take more than one sip of it.

As Harvey navigated his somewhat circuitous route from the bar, the road and the sky seemed to run together before him. The bright sun blinded and bothered him. He suddenly felt ill and his clothes felt very tight and he was even less happy about being a reporter and in a suburb twenty-one miles from his big-city newspaper than before, and most of all there was that impossible story about trees.

A good reporter is good probably for a variety of vague reasons, but one thing is certain: He usually doesn't stay being a reporter unless he has curiosity and a desire to get up close to what he's reporting. This trait was so inbred in Journalist Winslow that even now with pints of the ungodly furniture polish aboard him, he headed instinctively for the subjects of his story to be —even though they were trees!

Not far from the cluster of little buildings that made up Brooks Agricultural College, its satellite structures and the small town, was a wooded area. Harvey labored his way across a football field which now lay unkept and deserted under the spring sky. He lurched in among the trees embracing an oak (not in affection but of necessity as he lost his balance). Elaborately he started to tip his hat, laughed at his own silliness and stumbled on a few more paces. The brilliance of the sun was gone in here. It was cool and the cheap burning liquor within him didn't seem to burn and joggle up and down as much. His shoulder rammed a maple and the shock knocked him sideways.

"Might as well sit down," he muttered aloud already seated, his back against the belligerent maple.

It wasn't bad here, he thought. Certainly he was right at the source. His befuddled brain fumed through an alcoholic haze.

"Angle, angle, angle. What's there to say about trees? They were, and they grew, and somebody chopped them down and chopped them up and burned them or used them to make a building or . . . well, a baseball bat."

"George," muttered Harvey. "George, you're a misguided stupid old man."

George was G. Talmers, citywide editor of the *Western News-Chronicle* and Winslow's boss.

"Look at the jobs I've done on crimes, George," muttered Winslow broken-heartedly. "Why I've got the second sight and the intuition of a hundred women. Didn't I get a slant on the Logan case that cracked it open, and you get me to do a Sunday supplement—on trees!"

After a while Harvey stopped muttering. The liquor flowed, not churned through him, and deadened his outraged feelings. It was cool here among the trees, and on the way back to the city tonight he'd think up something on the train. He'd get an angle. He always did.

Harvey Winslow's head fell slackly to one side. His eyes, although open, saw little. On his face was a set, foolish grin. The fingers of his hands spread out in the earth. Through the trees that surrounded him, he could see the football field he'd traversed, and beyond that buildings of the college town. Time passed unaccounted-for and Winslow sat there. A slight wind pushed and tickled at his face but the grin remained set. The name of Talmers, city editor, flashed through his mind briefly and was engulfed happily in alcohol. The wind rustled some more.

AND then the rustling came to have a pattern. It nagged at him and then there was a voice, more voices, many voices. Distinguishable.

"One said: "I hear we'll be next."

"Yes, they've decided."

"Let's make this our time then."

"We have waited long enough."

Winslow said "huh" out loud but there was nothing there. There was really no sound. It was in his head with the alcohol. He settled against the maple and listened.

"It's very simple."

"The conceit of these creatures."

"They have mistreated us, hacked us up and cut us down for ages."

"Sent us screaming and crashing to the ground with never a thought that we were living beings far more civilized than they—and perhaps because of our very advancement less able to defend ourselves."

"But things are different now."

"Soon they will be."

"We will know."

"We will act as we have planned."

"Are the others ready?"

"Not here and some place else somewhere, but everywhere."

"Let it start here but it will be finished in all places."

"We have not sought this battle but now it's ours and we will win."

Winslow shook himself as though a man with a bad dream. The voices were nowhere but in his head. They were voices—not one but different ones.

"We will march that day they come to cut us down."

"We will head for the city."

The voices droned on. Plans like a military campaign, and Winslow's mind made pictures clear as a Leica. The trees would march. The elms and oaks and maples, the big ones and the little ones too. The people in the towns would see and scream and go mad. The madness would spread across the countryside as the trees, all of them, marched on. Buildings would be destroyed by the tonnage of moving menacing wooden robots. People could run but there would be no escape. They would be caught up in the now-living tentacled branches. The horror would stalk down the highways. Opposition would be absurdly futile. The news would flash ahead and skeptical city-dwellers would sneer.

Then the first of the lumbering giants of wood would appear. People would run in terror as bridges and ramps would be wrecked, cars overturned and finally they would seek refuge in their caves of steel and cement, but the trees would press on, their branches crashing through windows and reaching inside. Even the skyscrapers would shake as thousands of huge oaks would pile against their brick and concrete sides reaching their knobby lengths up five, six, seven, and eight stories.

"It's all so simple," said a voice.

"It will be so totally unexpected."

"No one will be prepared to combat us, for how could they?"

"This time it shall always be ours."

"We shall never become so absorbed in our own glorious and exalted civilization as to forget and ignore the evidence of these creatures around us and allow them to become such self-important annoying destructive little forces."

The imagery kept up . . . nightmare pictures of huge, tall murdering monsters with a hundred branchlike arms reaching out, octopus fashion.

WINSLOW somehow crawled away on hands and knees. As the day waned, it grew cold and chill and Winslow found himself on all fours inching toward the football field. The trees were behind him now and the only sound was the faint rustling of the wind.

The air had a sobering effect and Harvey forced himself erect. He knew nothing except that he felt very sick from the liquor. He staggered toward the town, and with the help of a solicitous policeman found the local hostelry. There, with the aid of his newspaper credentials and a large tip, he was able to persuade the dubious clerk to give him a room and send a wire to his city desk explaining that he was staying on. Winslow fell into bed in his room.

Brightness and a terrific headache were the next things he knew. It was morning of the following day. For a while he lay in bed wondering first where he was, then when he recalled that, why he was there.

His first reaction to the answer was one of disgust. The darned Sunday supplement story, "Trees!" Then the recollection of his experience in the forest gripped him. He shook his head and needles of pain shot from temple to temple. He grumbled to himself. Liquor had never before given him hallucinations. He dressed and went downstairs finding a telegram from his office. It was from the city editor: "Where is story? Call. Talmers."

Between the wire and his headache, Winslow had a good excuse to frown. He went into a nearby restaurant and drank down three cups of black coffee, one right

after another. There was something disturbing about last night. It was his old intuition going. He felt as he had felt many times before, the way he felt when something big was about to break. He'd get the feeling working on a case. He'd never been wrong yet. That was why they called him "Hunch" Harvey, and whether they kidded him or not about it, and they usually did, everybody around the office took it for granted that there was something in it. Winslow had a feel for these things. Could that furniture-polish liquor have upset him to the degree of giving him these premonitions?

Winslow paid for the coffee and strode back to the hotel feeling better. He went into a booth and called the *Western News-Chronicle*.

He mumbled an extension number to the answering voice and waited impatiently until Talmers' gruff tones came on.

"Hello George, this is Harvey."

There were a few imprecations from the other end. When they became coherent, the voice said: "What the devil do you think you're doing up there? Going to school? Look, I sent you out after a story. You don't need to retire!"

"Wait a minute, wise guy," began Winslow. "You got to let me stay here a day or so more. I think I've got an angle on something."

"You were sent up there to get a piece on trees for our supplement! I don't care if the President is passing through tomorrow. I want your story!"

"Wait a minute, Talmers. You always were a thick-headed guy. I'll get your story on trees but I'm trying to work a new twist to it. Give me a day or so more. I'll call you tomorrow, huh?"

"Suppose this is another one of your inspirations, eh 'Hunch'?"

"Have I ever gone wrong on a thing, Boss?"

"What about those horses you gave me last . . . ?"

"Aw, quit kidding, George. Listen, remember the Moran case and I walked in and saw the suspects, waited around and talked to them for a while and came back to the office and told you it was the wife that did it? You laughed at me about that, didn't you? And yet the coppers wised up to her after a few weeks. I got maybe a big story breaking up here. Let me hang on to it."

"You been drinking again," growled the receiver.

Winslow's denial died in his throat guiltily.

"Just a day or so more, Talmers. I'll get your story in. What else would you be doing with me anyway? With that short-handed staff of yours, you'd probably want me to straighten up the files or clean out the beer bottles in your desk."

"Now look, Winslow," bellowed the city editor. "I can't fool around humoring you dreamers. You get that story in to me and get back here pronto, see?"

"Yeah, yeah, Chief. You'll get it. Just a day or so extra."

AND before any more orders could come from the other end, Harvey slammed up the receiver. He walked around the town that morning noting with the avid interest of a city dweller those commonplaces of the semi-country that are accepted by suburbanites. The grass and the trees did look kind of good. The trees in the city were small and weak and sickly. Those out here were strong and huge. Formidable they were. All the same family though, the phrase came to him. All the same family. City trees, country trees, trees everywhere. Big and little. He wrinkled his forehead.

In the afternoon Winslow strolled back over the athletic grounds of the agricultural college toward the wooded area beyond. It was the summer recess and this part of the town was deserted. As best he could, he retraced the steps he had taken yesterday. He sat down under an old oak, took a cigarette out and lit it. He put his head back against the tree. A bird twittered somewhere above and from the distance the warm summer air carried to him the hooting of a train far off and then farther. He wasn't uncomfortable out here and yet somehow he missed the el and the horns and the noises that millions of people together in a small area of paving stone and brick and iron can make. Another cigarette followed the first Doggone it all but it was peaceful in the country. He thought suddenly that this was the first time he had really relaxed in months. With the paper short-handed be-

cause of the war, it was a terrific grind day after day with not even much of night-time or week-end recess.

He leaned his head back against the uneven knobby bark. He felt drowsy and worried vaguely about his supplement story. Then suddenly a small distinct picture flew into his mind. It grew larger like trick photography thrown against a screen, with the center object coming toward you at tremendous speed. Immediately it was all before him, a picture somehow distorted of men in bright checked windbreakers and mackinaws sawing and chopping at these trees. They were all around him, their huge cross-saws working away furiously, and even as he watched, the trees came crashing to the ground, their huge still lengths humbled and defeated before him, and in their trunks and foliage he seemed to see agonized visages, distorted expressions of pain, of fear, of death. These men worked on, and then almost like a moving picture, except that the letters did not appear visually before him but only in idea form in his brain, the phrase came.

"We have heard."

"We know."

"They are going to cut us down."

"That is when we must act."

"We, and other trees all over, everywhere."

Once again scenes flashed before his eyes —armies of trees marching in orderly formation sweeping all before them, the human creatures driven, driven, running and screaming, a sight too horrible to behold—the revolt of the trees.

On and on they would come, stopping only occasionally to sink their hungry roots into the earth, to take unto themselves new nourishment, and then march on.

OH, HUMANS would not give up easily. There would be airplanes and bombs and bullets. The men with their axes and saws. People would try to fire the army of wood and some of the trees would die. But imagine the trees in a forest. Imagine the trees in a whole country of forests. They were too many to be stopped. Bullets do no good. Huge edifices of steel and stone would be by-passed and their hiding tenants blockaded to starvation. There was no escape. Water was no obstacle to these huge, buoyant, bobbing masses. Phrases, voices crowded into Winslow's mind following so swiftly one after another that they plopped in and plopped out like a rubber ball thrown into an empty bucket.

"The world of trees has come alive."

"We have stood silently for ages taking the mistreatment and abuse of human creatures."

"Our very existence has been threatened by carelessly set fires, by greed, by the thoughtlessness of little creatures who have climbed us and deformed us by breaking our limbs."

Somehow Winslow fought to his feet against an overpower oppression, against a density of evil that came from all sides, against voices that were hurled back and forth.

"When they come to cut us down, that will be the signal."

And something else that shocked him even more. An idea that came to him in words . . . a voice that was saying:

"Look there. There is a creature."

"A hated human creature walking below there."

"But nothing does he know of the plans of the trees."

Winslow staggered from the forest, his gait unsteady, and unsure—this time from horror. He went straight to his hotel and sat down. For a long time the chill in his body would not go; nor would the coldness of his hands and feet despite the warm air that gently whispered through the open window.

He got up and looked at himself in the mirror. He fingered his white face nervously. He noticed a piece of bark adhered to the back of his hand and he shook it off as one would a spider.

"This isn't like me," he said to his image in the mirror. "What's got you, Hunch?" He shook his head. He was used to the sinister aspects of big-city crime and violence. Why should a bit of small-town bad liquor and an overexcited imagination knock him off his trolley like this?

Still there was something awful about those images of the trees. The macabre idea appealed to him as good drama. If all the trees should suddenly decide to fight. If they had the power to pull their roots up out of

the earth and march together. Good Lord! Twice he'd felt these things. There was yesterday after he'd gotten boiled with the bar furniture polish, but then again today. He was drunk yesterday. Had he dozed off completely today?

"I don't think so," Harvey muttered aloud to himself. "I don't understand this. I've had these things all my life. Ideas. Flashes. They mean something. They always have. What's the point of this though? I can't get it. Unless . . . unless it's true!

Winslow's voice rose almost to a cry. That was the awful part. That was the worst thing about this. He hadn't said it to himself, or hadn't admitted it. He knew it was true! He knew it more strongly than anything he'd ever known before in his life. The trees. They did live. Professor Hodges said they were life. Damnit, you knew that if you'd been to school at all. What's a tree? A seed. A seed somebody puts in the ground and it grows. That's life. That's a form of life. What about those plants somewhere? Oh, he'd read it somewhere. Plants that ate flies, even small animals. Professor Hodges said they were the lowest form of life. Nothing interesting about them, said the Professor, but what do we know? We know so very, very little. That was it. He'd go to see Hodges. He'd tell Hodges what he'd heard. Obviously something had to be done. Maybe now there'd still be time if all over the country men were armed. Fire could stop the trees before they knew it. Before they started to march and destroy and kill. He'd see the old professor.

HE RANG the school and found Hodges could see him in a few hours. He spent the intervening time peering out the window moodily toward the forest. The town was small, surrounded by trees. He suddenly knew he was trapped. They were all trapped. When the trees started to march, they would be caught from all sides, caught between huge wooden juggernauts.

On his way over to Hodges' later, it first occurred to him that he wouldn't be believed. He was annoyed at himself for not thinking of that before because it was the most obvious fact of the whole inexplainable business. No one would believe him. Objectively, he didn't believe himself. Hodges would think he was drunk or insane or just a fresh reporter trying to have a laugh at the expense of an academician.

His steps slowed as he neared the faculty residence building. What was he to say? He came to a stop for a moment outside the building and then resolutely pushed inside, his mind made up. Of course Hodges would think he was crazy. It was too absurd even for one of Winslow's psychical hunches.

The old professor greeted him cordially. They talked for a moment about the school. Then Winslow brought up the subject of trees again. Hodges smiled.

"There's so little to say about trees," he deprecated. "They are plentiful and useful but most uninteresting. They are nothing like flowers."

Winslow could see with half an eye that the professor was a flower admirer. His room was filled with them.

"Is it possible that a tree could have a mentality . . . could have any sort of thought process of its own?"

"Don't be absurd, my boy," said Hodges. "Ah," he twinkled then. "I suppose you people have to go to any lengths to think of novel approaches for your reportorial efforts. However, they have given you a hard proposition with trees. Things were done under or near trees, that's true, historically speaking," brightened Hodges, "but the trees themselves are like, well, like great boulders on a cliff. Oh, you may quote me on any of this," Professor Hodges waved airily. "My name, you know, James, Lea, with an 'A,' Hodges."

Winslow nodded. There was nothing here but an old man who liked flowers and wasn't interested in trees and was clinging to the dim hope that possibly he would get his name in a Sunday supplement feature.

Winslow was about to leave when the memory of something came to him.

"By the way, Professor, that wooded area back of the athletic grounds," Winslow motioned with his arm. "I was walking through there. What sort of trees are those?"

"Maples and oaks," said Hodges absently. "That's a dreary bit of wood in there. You know they've decided to cut down those trees," he added more animatedly.

Winslow's mouth went dry. "Cut them down?" he croaked.

"Yes, yes," said the professor. "We need to expand here, you know."

One factor became terribly important to Harvey Winslow.

"Tell me, Professor. Tell me," he pushed. "Did you tell me this when I was in yesterday?"

"'Bout the trees being cut down?" said the teacher. "Why, no, I didn't say anything about it. I didn't know then, anyway. Fact is, I learned about it after you left. I've always suggested that area could be put to some good use. A colleague phoned me not long after you left, telling me the authorities had decided to act on my suggestion."

"I see. Well—"

"Well what, young man?"

"I don't know how to say this. I just wouldn't cut down those trees. I mean I think it's nice over there. I've sat in there a couple of times. It's restful and cool. It seems a shame to destroy those trees."

HODGES puffed up. "There are other places where you can sit, young man. After all, I believe we of the college are capable of deciding how much land we need."

"Oh," said Winslow in hopelessness. "Yes, I guess you're right. It seems a shame, thought. It's too bad not to leave it the way it is."

He turned and started toward the door.

"I hope I've been of help," said Hodges.

"Sure, thanks a lot," the reporter called. "Anything else I can tell you, just let me know. Remember that middle name is Lea with an 'A.'"

"Yeah," said Winslow.

It was getting dark as Winslow walked back toward the hotel. There was another hysterical telegram from Talmers waiting for him. He went upstairs to his room and lay down fully clothed on his bed. He didn't even feel like eating. He had another bit of strangeness to make his worries more tangible. How had he come to learn that the trees in that field back of the football ground were to be cut down?

For several hours Winslow lay and tossed on his bed, chain-smoking and picking at his fingernails irritably. Around midnight he got to his feet and went downstairs, walking gently past the sleeping night clerk.

The little college town had gone to bed two hours earlier and there seemed no one else abroad. The few lights twinkled disconsolately in the gloom as he set out toward the football field and the forest beyond. A car passed him on the road, two people sitting very close together. It was a comforting sight and it made Winslow realize how lonely he felt.

The surface of the football ground gave spongily beneath his weight. The wet grass licked at his ankles as he walked on. He came to the slight slope beyond which a path led down into the wooded district. The night grew blacker as he advanced, and then from out of the core of the blackness loomed the outer sentinels of the wooden army.

A new emotion clenched at Winslow's midriff squeezing his stomach and heart and forcing his breathing faster. Many times he'd been nervous and excited but never before had he known anything like this . . . a feeling of deep ominous fear, almost of terror.

He forced himself onward into the woods, reasoning with himself every step of the way. It was a completely still night; the midnight rule of summer had fallen upon the wind too. Not a leaf rustled except where he trod upon them on the ground. He walked until the lights of the town were no more. He was in the center surrounded, he felt, by an alien army aware of his every move. He lit a match and his imagination told him that they were watching, their grim visages looking down appraising and calculating. His imagination told him that they knew he knew. His imagination told him to run. He grimaced as the flame of the dwindling match bit into his finger.

It dropped . . . a red glow falling to the ground. The blackness closed in about him.

SOMEWHERE in the night a train whistled accentuating his loneliness, making him think of lights and brightness and human creatures. His mind filled with thoughts of resentment now. Why shouldn't they clean out this filthy black hole? Build something bright and clean that men could use? A greenhouse, a gym, or a building? There was a story here but he knew he could never write it because nobody would believe him, never even believe "Hunch" Winslow, but

he believed it and knew it was true. He realized suddenly now what he must do.

He was in the middle of this monstrous robot army. He knew what they planned. He must stop them. The matches were still in his hand. He would fire this place. He flicked the cover up and gripped one, two, and bent the cover back. He struck them and bent down. The wet leaves were slow to catch. He gathered a few twigs with his free hand. They sputtered and hissed. He worked feverishly now. It was so dank and damp. Vaguely he heard a rustling, the wind coming up. The matches burned to his finger tips and he shook them out, fumbling for new ones.

He struck two more, and as he did so, the rustling grew. There was another sound and he realized it was in his own throat. A couple of branches sputtered. The flame took hold and there was a feeble warm light. His matches burned out and he reached for the last three in the book. He struck them and furiously tried to build the flame. With his hands he scratched some more leaves and branches over, unnoticing of the growing rustling around him, the waving branches . . . the *movement*.

A sharp pain stung through the fingers of his right hand and again he shook the last of his matches away. He must keep this fire going. He *must!* He must build it until the flames reached up and engulfed a tree and then the other trees. He blew gently and the flame showed yellowish-blue. It tried to encompass the wet leaves he pulled toward it. A wind hit the back of his neck. The dead leaves rustled and scattered and the flames dipped dangerously low. Harvey whimpered. His breathing was heavy. He was on all fours now working like one possessed. The rustling redoubled and before his eyes the fire smouldered, then it was a pinpoint and finally it was gone even as he frantically held his hands around the last little glimmer of warmth and light.

For a moment he stayed on all fours, the twigs cooling under his fingers. He didn't want to turn his head or look up, for a great and ominous creaking was above and behind and on all sides of him. Then he was seized with only one thought. Get up. Get out. Run for the town. Get out of there as soon as he could. In the blackness he knew not which way to turn. He stumbled forward and plowed with cruel impact into a tree. His cries were short and staccato now, coming with his short breathing. He turned to one side and plunged furiously forward, and again his body was stopped and bruised by the knobby side of a huge tree. He turned completely around and started in the other direction. His hands were in front of his head protectively. He took a few steps and his elbows bumped sickeningly into wood. He raised his voice then and yelled for help and his cries came back to him from all sides.

The rumbling and rustling, these were laughter. He put his hands out and felt on all sides. There was wood everywhere, hard knobby bark. He was trapped. As though in a wooden stockade. The damp, unfriendly ground beneath him, the wood on all sides, and above those creaking slithering things dropping lower. The branches were coming for him, flaying and beating at him, one iron tentacle hooked at his arm, another at his body, a third swished across his mouth cutting off his screams. He fell to the ground as though under the blows of a huge mob, and the trees around him laughed.

* * * * *

IT WAS the fourth telegram from the *Western News-Chronicle* that upset the manager of the hotel where Winslow had stayed. The elderly, paunchy constable came over by request and went up to the reporter's room.

"Nope, here's his bag. He wouldn't leave without that. Yes, he's got this typewriter up here that would more than pay for the room rent. Say, here's an article half-finished."

The pudgy defender of the law leaned forward squinting his near-sighted eyes.

" 'Bout trees, that's all I can make out."

The clerk fussed around the room and then the two men left.

"Constable, he went to see Professor Hodges over at the college. Might find out something over there."

"Good idea, Ben. I'll look him up."

"Okay. I wouldn't worry though. He'll be back. Looks like an expensive portable upstairs and they're hard to get these days."

Professor Hodges could throw no light on Harvey Winslow's disappearance and no-

body was inclined to do much about it until later in the day when the *News-Chronicle,* having gotten no satisfaction with telegrams and phone calls, sent another and very indignant reporter to the college suburb. With the opportunity of making the big-town press, Constable Evans than organized a few drowsy deputies, and with Professor Hodges, who also had hopes of seeing his name in print and the reporter from the *News-Chronicle,* they set out.

Two hours later, they came upon Harvey Winslow's body in the wooded district beyond the college grounds. Constable Evans had various theories of foul play. He suggested that possibly one of the inmates of a neighboring insane asylum had done the peculiarly brutal job, but a later checkup revealed discouragingly that no inmate had escaped within the last two years.

There were no clues, no footprints, just an inhumanly battered corpse. State and local police combed the ground without adding anything to the findings. One of the things that intrigued and puzzled the *News-Chronicle* reporter the most, and added the proper speculative note to his yarn, was that "Hunch" Winslow's body was covered with bark and splinters of wood, some of these even having been driven into the flesh. It was the most inexplicable, and as the *News-Chronicle* man filed from the scene of the tragedy: "Ironically, this is just the sort of seemingly unsolvable crime that Harvey Winslow with his uncanny 'sixth sense' would have tackled so successfully.

The Shape of Thrills to Come

LORDS OF THE GHOSTLAND *by Seabury Quinn*

A Long Novelette of Jules de Grandin

• • •

H. Bedford-Jones

• **Harold Lawlor** •

Manly Wade Wellman

and others

WEIRD TALES for MARCH

Out January First

The Green God's Ring

By SEABURY QUINN

ST. DUNSTAN'S was packed to overflowing. Expectantly smiling ladies in cool crêpe and frilly chiffon crowded against perspiring gentlemen in formal afternoon dress while they craned necks and strained ears. Aisles, chancel, sanctuary, were embowered in July roses and long trailing garlands of southern smilax, the air was heavy with the humid warmth of summer noon, the scent of flowers and the perfume from the women's hair and clothes.

The dean of the Cathedral Chapter, the red of his Cambridge hood in pleasing contrast to the spotless white of linen surplice and sleek black cassock, pronounced the fateful words, his calm clear voice a steady mentor for the bridegroom's faltering echo:

"I, Wade, take thee Melanie to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward—"

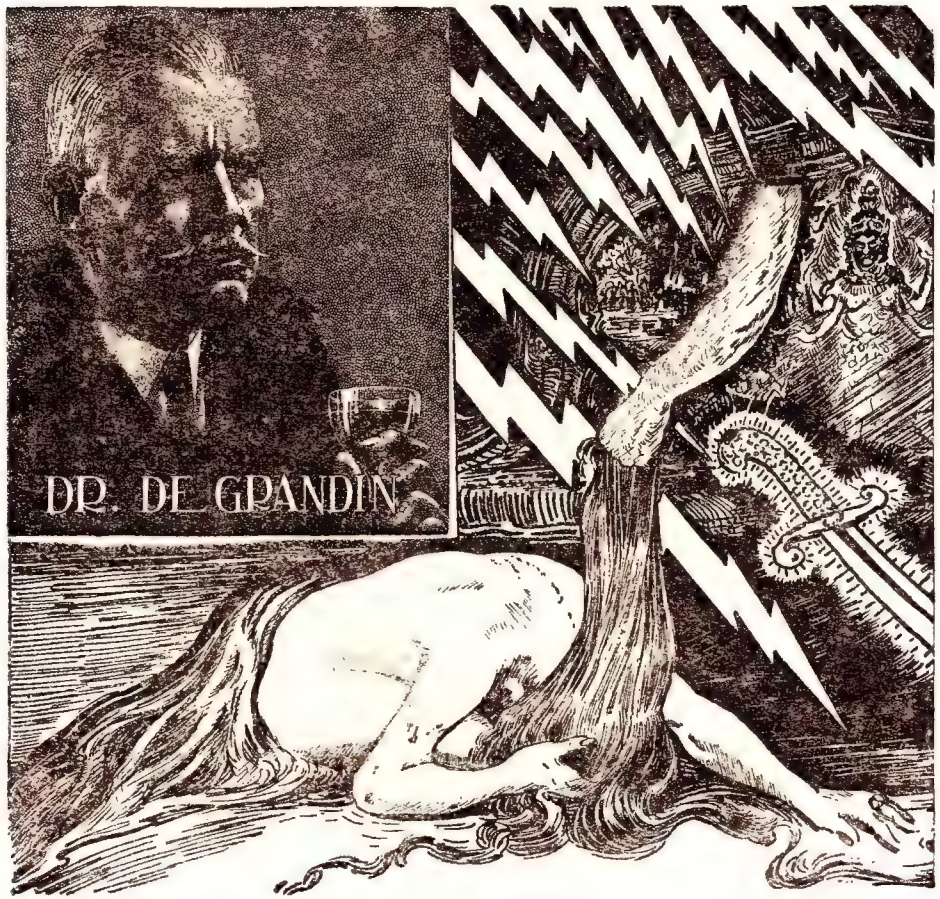
"From this day forward," Dean Quincy repeated, smiling with gentle tolerance. In forty years of priesthood he had seen more than one bridegroom go suddenly dumb. "From this day forward, for better, for worse—"

His smile lost something of its amusement, his florid, smooth-shaven face assumed an expression of mingled surprise and consternation which in other circumstances would have seemed comic. Swaying back and forth from toes to heels, from heels to toes, the bridegroom balanced uncertainly a moment, then with a single short, hard, retching cough fell forward like an overturned image, the gilded hilt of his dress sword jangling harshly on the pavement of the chancel.

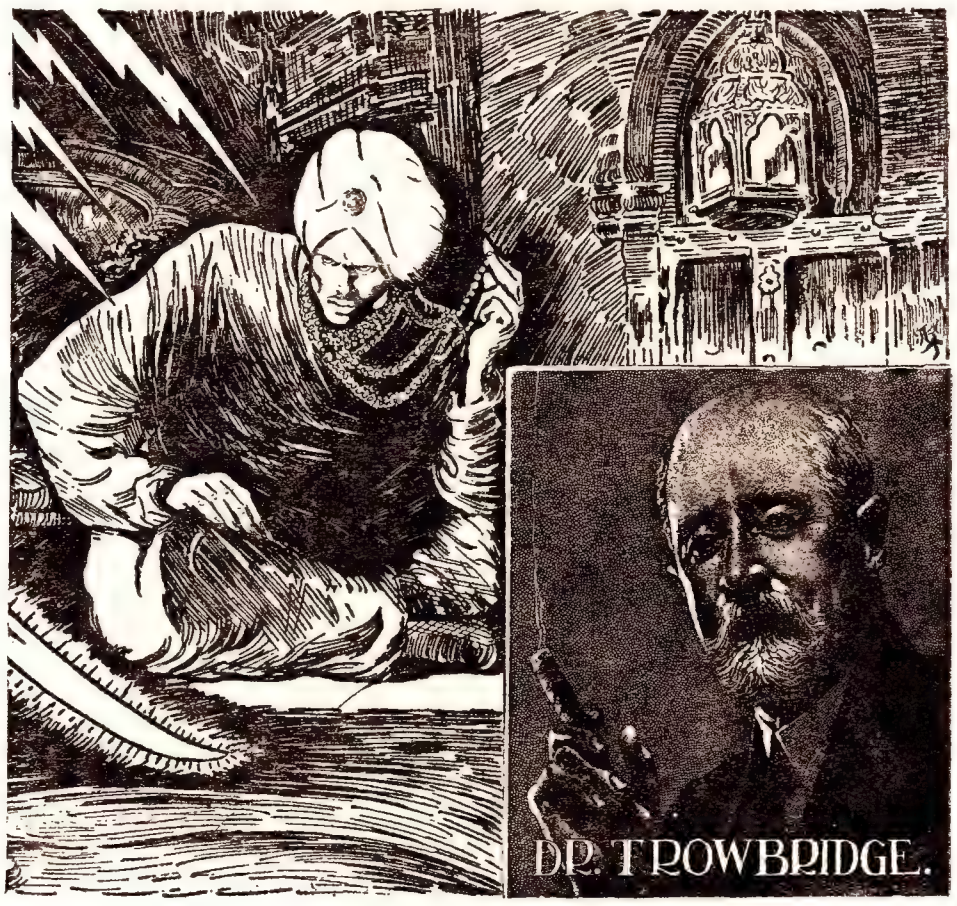
For what seemed half a minute the bride looked down at the fallen groom with wide, horrified eyes, then, flowing lace veil billowing about her like wind-driven foam, she dropped to her knees, thrust a lace-sheathed arm beneath his neck and raised his head to pillow it against the satin and seed pearls of her bodice. "Wade," she whispered in a passionless, cold little voice that carried to the farthest corner of the death-still church. "Oh, Wade, my belovèd!"

Quickly, with the quiet efficiency bred of their training, the young Naval officers attending the fallen bridegroom wheeled in

The demons attend Siva in his attribute of Bhirta the Terrible, doing his foul bidding and, if such a thing be possible, bettering his instructions



Heading by A. R. TILBURNE



their places and strode down the aisle to shepherd panic-stricken guests from their pews.

"Nothin' serious; nothin' at all," a lad who would not see his twenty-fifth birthday for another two years whispered soothingly through trembling lips as he motioned Jules de Grandin and me from our places. "Lieutenant Hardison is subject to these spells. Quite all right, I assure you. Ceremony will be finished in private—in the vestry room when he's come out of it. See you at the reception in a little while. Everything's all right. Quite—"

The pupils of de Grandin's little round blue eyes seemed to have expanded like those of an alert tom cat, and his delicate, slim nostrils twitched as though they sought to capture an elusive scent. *"Mais oui, mon brave,"* he nodded approval of the young one-striper's tact. "We understand. *Certainement.* But me, I am a physician, and this is my good friend, Dr. Trowbridge—"

"Oh, are you, sir?" the lad broke in almost beseechingly. "Then for God's sake go take a look at him; we can't imagine—"

"But of course not, *con enfant.* Diagnosis is not your trade," the small Frenchman whispered. "Do you prevail upon the congregation to depart while we—*attendez-moi,* Friend Trowbridge," he ordered in a low voice as he tiptoed toward the chancel where the stricken bride still knelt and nursed the stricken bridegroom's head against her bosom.

"Sacré nom!" he almost barked the exclamation as he came to a halt by the tragic tableau formed by the kneeling bride and supine man. *"C'est cela même."*

There was no doubting his terse comment. In the glassy-eyed, hang-jawed expression of the bridegroom's face we read the trade mark of the King of Terrors. Doctors, soldiers and morticians recognize death at a glance.

"Come, Melanie," Mrs. Thurmond put a trembling hand upon her daughter's shoulder. "We must get Wade to a doctor, and—"

"A doctor?" the girl's voice was small and still as a night breeze among the branches. "What can a doctor do for my poor murdered darling? Oh, Wade, my dear, my dear," she bent until her lips were at his ear, "I loved you so, and I'm your murderess."

Non, Mademoiselle," de Grandin denied softly. "You must not say so. It may be we can help you—"

"Help? *Ha!"* she almost spit the exclamation at him. "What help can there be for him—or me? Go away—get out—all of you!" she swept the ring of pitying faces with hard bright eyes almost void of all expression. "Get out, I tell you, and leave me with my dead!"

De Grandin drew the slim black brows that were in such sharp contrast to his wheat blond hair down in a sudden frown. *"Mademoiselle,"* his voice was cold as icy spray against her face, "you ask if any one can help you, and I reply they can. I, Jules de Grandin can help you, despite the evil plans of pisacha, bhirta and preta, shahini and rakshash, I can help—"

The girl cringed from his words as from a whip. "Pisacha, bhirta and preta," she repeated in a trembling, terrified whisper. You *know—"*

"Not altogether, *Mademoiselle,"* he answered, "but I shall find out, you may be assured."

"What is it you would have me do?"

Go hence and leave us to do that which must needs be done. Anon I shall call on you, and if what I have the intuition to suspect is true, *tenez,* who knows?"

She drew a kneeling cushion from the step before the altar rail and eased the dead boy's head down to it. "Be kind, be gentle with him, won't you?" she begged. "Good-by, my darling, for a little while," she laid a light kiss on the pale face pillowed on the crimson cushion. "Good-by—" Tears came at last to her relief and, weeping piteously, she stumbled to her mother's waiting arms and tottered to the vestry room.

"HEART?" I hazarded as the bridal party left us alone with the dead man.

"I should think not," he denied with a shake of his head. "He was on the Navy's active list, that one, and those with cardiac affections do not rate that."

"Perhaps it was the heat—"

"Not if Jules de Grandin knows his heat prostration symptoms, and he has spent much time near the Equator. The fires of

hell would have been cold beside the temperature in here when all those curious ones were assembled to see this poor one and his belovèd plight their troth, but did not seem well enough when he came forth to meet her at the chancel steps? Men who will fall prone on their faces in heat collapse show symptoms of distress beforehand. Yes, of course. Did you see his color? Excellent, was it not? But certainly. Bronzed from the sea and sun, *au teint vermeil de bon santé.* We were not thirty feet away, and could see perfectly. He had none of that pallor that betokens heat stroke. No."

"Well, then"—I was a little nettled at the cavalier way he dismissed my diagnoses —"what d'ye think it was?"

He lifted narrow shoulders in a shrug that was a masterpiece of disavowal of responsibility. *"Le bon Dieu* knows, and He keeps His own counsel. Perhaps we shall be wiser when the autopsy is done."

We left the relatively cool shadow of the church and stepped out to the sun-baked noonday street. "If you will be so kind, I think that I should like to call on the good Sergeant Costello," he told me as we reached my parked car.

"Why Costello?" I asked. "It's a case of sudden unexplained death, and as such one for the coroner, but as for any criminal element—"

"Perhaps," he agreed, seeming only half aware of what we talked of. "Perhaps not. At any rate, I think there are some things about this case in which the Sergeant will be interested."

We drove a few blocks in silence, then: "What was that gibberish you talked to Melanie?" I asked, my curiosity bettering my pique. "That stuff about your being able to help her despite the evil plans of the thingabobs and whatchamaycallems? It sounded like pure double talk to me, but she seemed to understand it."

He chuckled softly. "The pisacha, bhirta and preta? The shahini and rakshash?"

"That sounds like it."

"That, my friend, was what you call the random shot, the drawing of the bow at venture. I had what you would call the hunch."

"How d'ye mean?"

"Did you observe the ring upon the index finger of her right hand?"

"You mean the big red gold band set with a green cartouche?"

"Précisément."

"Not particularly. It struck me as an odd sort of ornament to wear to her wedding, more like a piece of costume jewelry than an appropriate bridal decoration, still these modern youngsters—"

"That modern youngster, my friend, did not wear that ring because she wanted to."

"No? Why, then?"

"Because she had to."

"Oh, come, now. You can't mean—"

"I can and do, my friend. Did not you notice the device cut into its setting?"

"Why, no. What was it?"

"It represented a four-faced, eight-armed monstrosity holding a straining woman in unbreakable embrace. The great God Siva—"

"Siva? You mean the Hindu deity?"

"Perfectly. He is a veritable chamelon, that one, and can change his form and color at a whim. Sometimes he is as mild and gentle as a lamb, but mostly he is fierce and passionate as a tiger. Indeed, his lamb-like attributes are generally a disguise, for underneath the softness is the cruelty of his base nature. *Tiens,* I think that he is best described as Bhirta, the Terrible."

"And those others with outlandish names?"

"The pisacha and preta are a race of most unlovely demons, and like them are the rakshash and shahini. They attend Siva in his attribute of Bhirta the Terrible as imps attend on Satan, doing his foul bidding and, if such a thing be possible, bettering his instructions."

"Well?"

"By no means, my friend, not at all. It is not well, but very bad indeed. A Christian maiden has no business wearing such a talisman, and when I saw it on her finger I assumed that she might know something of its significance. Accordingly I spoke to her of the Four-Faced One, Bhirta and his attendant implings, the shahini, raksash and pischa. *Parbleu,* she understood me well enough. Altogether too well, I damn think."

"She seemed to, but—"

"There are no buts, my friend. She understood me. Anon I shall understand her. Now let us interview the good Costello."

DETECTIVE-SERGEANT JEREMIAH COSTELLO was in the act of putting down the telephone as we walked into his office. "Good afternoon, sors," he greeted as he fastened a wilted collar and began knotting a moist necktie. "'Tis glad I'd be to welcome ye at any other time, but jist now I'm in a terin' hurry. Some swell has bumped himself off at a fashionable wedding, or if he didn't exactly do it, he died in most suspicious circumstances, an'—"

"It would not be Lieutenant Wade Hardison you have reference to?"

"Bedad, sor, it ain't Mickey Mouse!"

"Perhaps, then, we can be of some assistance. We were present when it happened."

"Were ye, indeed, sor? What kilt 'im?"

"I should like to know that very much indeed, my friend. That is why I am here. It does not make the sense. One moment he is hale and hearty, the next he falls down dead before our eyes. I have seen men shot through the brain fall in the same way. Death must have been instantaneous—"

"An' ye've no hunch wot caused it?"

"I have, indeed, *mon vieux*, but it is no more than the *avis indirect*—what you would call the hunch."

"Okay, sor, let's git goin'. Where to first?"

"Will you accompany me to the bride's house? I should like to interview her, but without official sanction it might be difficult."

"Howly Mackerel! Ye're not tellin' me *she* done it—"

"We have not yet arrived at the telling point, *mon ami*. Just now we ask the questions and collect the answers; later we shall assemble them like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Perhaps when we have completed the mosaic we shall know some things that we do not suspect now."

"I getcha," Costello nodded. "Let's be on our way, sors."

THE Thurmond place in Chattahoochee Avenue seemed cloaked in brooding grief as we drove up the wide driveway to the low, pillared front porch. A cemetery quiet filled the air, the hushed, tiptoe silence of the sickroom or the funeral chapel. The festive decorations of the house and grounds were as incongruous in that atmosphere of tragedy as rouge and paint upon the cheeks and lips of a corpse.

"Miss Melanie is too ill to be seen," the butler informed us in answer to Costello's inquiry. "The doctor has just left, and—"

"Present our compliments to her, if you please," de Grandin interrupted suavely. "She will see us, I make no doubt. Tell her it is the gentleman with whom she talked at the church—the one who promised her protection from Bhirta. Do you understand?"

"Bhirta?" the servant repeated wonderingly.

"Your accent leaves something to be desired, but it will serve. Do not delay, if you please, for I am not a patient person. By no means."

Draped in a sheer convent-made nightrobe that had been part of her trousseau, Melanie Thurmond lay rigid as death upon the big colonial sleigh bed of her chamber, a madeira sheet covering her to the bosom, her long auburn hair spread about her corpse-pale face like a rose gold nimbus framing an ivory ikon. Straight before her, with set, unseeing eyes she gazed, only the faint dilation of her delicate nostrils and the rhythmic rise and fall of her bosom testifying she had not already joined her stricken lover in the place he had gone a short hour before.

The little Frenchman approached the bed silently, bent and took her flaccid hand in his and raised it to his lips. *"Ma pauvre,"* he murmured. "It is truly I. I have come to help you, as I promised."

The ghost of a tired little smile touched her pale lips as she turned her head slowly on the pillow and looked at him with wide-set, tearless sepia eyes. "I knew that it would come," she told him in a hopeless little voice. Her words were slow and mechanical, her voice almost expressionless, as though she were rehearsing a half-learned lesson: "It had to be. I should have known it. I'm really Wade's murderess."

"Howly Mither!" Costello ejaculated softly, and de Grandin turned a sudden fierce frown on him.

"Comment?" he asked softly. "How do you mean that, *ma petite roitelette?*"

She shook her head wearily from side to side and a small frown gathered between her brows. "Somehow, I can't seem to think

clearly. My brain seems seething—boiling like a cauldron—"

"*Précisément, exactement, au juste,*" de Grandin agreed with a vigorous nod. "You have right, my little poor one. The brain, she is astew with all this trouble, and when she stews the recrement comes to the surface. Come, let us skim it off together, thou and I"—he made a gesture as if spooning something up and tossing it away. "Thus we shall rid our minds of dross and come at last to the sweet, unadulterated truth. How did it all start, if you please? What made you know it had to happen, and why do you accuse yourself all falsely of the murder of your *amoureux?*"

A little shudder shook the girl's slim frame, but a hint of color in her pallid cheeks told of a returning interest in life. "It all began with The Light of Asia?"

"*Quoi?*" de Grandin's slim brows rose in Saracenic arches. "You have reference to the poem by Sir Edward Arnold?"

"Oh, no. This Light of Asia was an Oriental bazar in East Fifty-sixth Street. The girls from Briarly were in the habit of dropping in there for little curios—quaint little gifts for people who already seemed to have everything, you know.

"It was a lovely place. No daylight ever penetrated there. Two great vases stood on ebony stands in the shop windows, and behind them heavy curtains of brocaded cloth of gold shut off the light from outside as effectively as solid doors. The shop—if you could call it that — was illuminated by lamps that burned scented oil and were encased in frames of carved and pierced teakwood. These, and two great green candles as tall as a man, gave all the light there was. The floors were covered with thick, shining Indian rugs, and lustrous embroideries hung against the walls. The stock was not on shelves, but displayed in cabinets of buhl and teak and Indian cedar—all sorts of lovely things: carved ivories and moulded silver, hand-worked gold and tortoise-shell, amethyst and topaz, jade and brass and lovely blue and green enamel, and over everything there hung the scent of incense, curiously and pungently sweet; it lacked the usual cloying, heavy fragrance of the ordinary incense, yet it was wonderfully penetrating, almost hypnotic."

DE GRANDIN nodded. "An interesting place, one gathers. And then—"

"I'd been to The Light of Asia half a dozen times before I saw The Green One."

"The Green One? *Qui diable?*"

"At the back of the shop there was a pair of double doors of bright vermilion lacquer framed by exquisitely embroidered panels. I'd often wondered what lay behind them. Then one day I found out! It was a rainy afternoon and I'd dropped into The Light as much to escape getting wet as to shop. There was no other customer in the place, and no one seemed in attendance, so I just wandered about, admiring the little bits of *virtu* in the cabinets and noting new additions to the stock, and suddenly I found myself at the rear of the shop, before the doors that had intrigued me so. There was no one around, as I told you, and after a hasty glance to make sure I was not observed, I put my hand out to the nearer door. It opened to my touch, as if it needed only a slight pressure to release its catch, and there in a gilded niche sat the ugliest idol I had ever seen.

"It seemed to be carved of some green stone, not like anything I'd ever seen before —almost waxen in its texture—and it had four faces and eight arms."

"*Qu'est-ce-donc?*"

"I said four faces. One looking each way from its head. Two of the faces seemed as calm as death masks, but the one behind the head had a dreadful sneering laugh, and that which faced the front had the most horrible expression—nor angry, nor menacing, exactly, but—would you understand me if I said it looked inexorable?"

"I should and do, *ma chère.* And the eight arms?"

"Every hand held something different. Swords, and sprays of leafy branches, and daggers—all but two. They were empty and outstretched, not so much seeming to beg as to demand an offering.

"There was something terrible—and terrifying—about that image. It seemed to be demanding something, and suddenly I realized what it was. It wanted me! I seemed to feel a sort of secret, dark thrill emanating from it, like the electric tingle in the air before a thunderstorm. There was some power in this thing, immense and terrifying

power that gave the impression of damned-up forces waiting for release. Not physical power I could understand and combat or run from, but something far more subtle; something uncanny and indescribable, and it was all the more frightening because I was aware of it, but could not explain nor understand it.

"It seemed as if I were hypnotized. I could feel the room begin to whirl about me slowly, like a carousel when it's just starting, and my legs began to tremble and weaken. In another instant I should have been on my knees before the green idol when the spell was broken by a pleasant voice: 'You are admiring our latest acquisition?'

"IT WAS a very handsome young man who stood beside me, not more than twenty-two or -three, I judged, with a pale olive complexion, long brown eyes under slightly drooping lids with haughty brows, and hair so sleek and black and glossy it seemed to fit his head like a skullcap of patent leather. He wore a well-cut morning coat and striped trousers, and there was a good pearl in his black poplin ascot tie.

"He must have seen the relief in my face, for he laughed before he spoke again, a friendly, soft laugh that reassured me. 'I am Kabanta Sikra Roy,' he told me. 'My dad owns this place and I help him out occasionally. When I'm not working here I study medicine at N. Y. U.'

" 'Is this image—or idol, or whatever you call it—for sale?' I asked him, more to steady my nerves by conversation than anything else.

"The look he gave me was an odd one. I couldn't make out if he were angry or amused, but in a moment he laughed again, and when he smiled his whole face lighted up. 'Of course, everything in the shop's for sale, including the proprietors—at a price,' he answered, 'but I don't think you'd be interested in buying it.'

" 'I should say not. But I just wondered. Isn't it some sort of god, or something?'

" 'Quite so. It is the Great Mahadeva, third, but by far the most important member of the Hindu Triad, sometimes known as Siva the Destroyer.'

"I looked at the thing again and it seemed even more repulsive than before. 'I shouldn't think you'd find a quick sale for it,' I suggested.

" 'We don't expect to. Perhaps we'll not sell it at all. In case we never find a buyer for it, we can put in our spare time worshiping at its shrine.'

"The utter cynicism of his reply grated on me, then I remembered having heard that many high caste Hindus have no more real faith in their gods than the educated Greeks and Romans had in theirs. But before I could be rude enough to ask if he really believed such nonsense, he had gently shepherded me away from the niche and was showing me some exquisitely carved amethysts. Before I left we found we had a dozen friends in common and he'd extended and I'd accepted an invitation to see *Life With Father* and go dancing at the Cotillion Room afterward.

"That began the acquaintance that ripened almost overnight into intimacy. Kabanta was a delightful playfellow. His father must have been enormously rich, for everything that had come to him by inheritance had been given every chance to develop. The final result was this tall, sender olive complexioned man with the sleek hair, handsome features and confident though slightly deferential manner. Before we knew it we were desperately in love.

"No"—her listless manner gathered animation with the recital—"it wasn't what you could call love; it was more like bewitchment. When we met I felt the thrill of it; it seemed almost to lift the hair on my head and make me dizzy, and when we were together it seemed as if we were the only two people in the world, as if we were cut off from everyone and everything. He had the softest, most musical voice I had ever heard, and the things he said were like poetry by Laurence Hope. Besides that, every normal woman has a masochistic streak buried somewhere deep in her nature, and the thought of the mysterious, glamorous East and the guarded, prisoned life of the zenana has an almost irresistible appeal to us when we're in certain moods. So, one night when we were driving home from New York in his sports roadster and he asked me if I cared for him I told him that I loved him with my heart and soul and

spirit. I did, too—then. There was a full moon that night, and I was fairly breathless with the sweet delirium of love when he took me in his arms and kissed me. It was like being hypnotized and conscious at the same time. Then, just before we said good night, he asked me to come to The Light of Asia next evening after closing time and plight our troth in Eastern fashion.

"I had no idea what was coming, but I was fairly palpitant with anticipation when I knocked softly on the door of the closed shop shortly after sunset the next evening.

"Kahanta himself let me in, and I almost swooned at sight of him. Every shred of his Americanism seemed to have fallen away, for he was in full Oriental dress, a long, tight-waisted frock coat of purple satin with a high neck and long, tight sleeves, tight trousers of white satin and bright red leather shoes turned up at the toes and heavily embroidered with gold, and on his head was the most gorgeous piece of silk brocade I'd ever seen wrapped into a turban and decorated with a diamond aigret. About his neck were looped not one nor two but three long strands of pearls—pink-white, green-white and pure-white—and I gasped with amazement at sight of them. There couldn't have been one in the three strands that was worth less than a hundred dollars, and each of the three strands had at least a hundred gems in it. The man wore twenty or thirty thousand dollars worth of pearls as nonchalantly as a shop girl might have worn a string of dime store beads.

"'Come in, White Moghra Blossom,' he told me. 'All is prepared.'

"The shop was in total darkness except for the glow of two silver lamps that burned perfumed oil before the niche in which the Green God crouched. 'You'll find the garments of betrothal in there,' Kahanta whispered as he led me to a door at the rear, 'and there's a picture of a Hindu woman wearing clothes like those laid out for you to serve as a model. Do not be long, O Star of My Delight, O Sweetly Scented Bower of Jasmine. I swoon for the sight of you arrayed to vow love undying.'

"IN THE little anteroom was a long, three-paneled mirror in which I could see myself from all sides, a dressing-table set with toilet articles and cosmetics, and my costume draped across a chair. On the dressing-table was an exquisite small picture of a Hindu girl in full regalia, and I slipped my Western clothes off and dressed myself in the Eastern garments, copying the pictured bride as closely as I could. There were only three garments—a little sleevelesss bodice like a zouave jacket of green silk dotted with bright yellow discs and fastened at the front with a gold clasp, a pair of long, tight plum-colored silk trousers embroidered with pink rosebuds, and a shawl of thin, almost transparent purple silk tissue fringed with gold tassels and worked with intricate designs of lotus buds and flowers in pink and green sequins. When I'd slipped the bodice and trousers on I draped the veil around me, letting it hang down behind like an apron and tying it in front in a bow knot with the ends tucked inside the tight waistband of the trousers. It was astonishing how modest such a scanty costume could be. There was less of me exposed than if I'd been wearing a halter and shorts, and not much more than if I'd worn one of the bare-midriff evening dresses just then becoming fashionable. For my feet there was a pair of bell toe rings, little clusters of silver bells set close together like grapes in a bunch that tinkled with a whirring chime almost like a whistle each time I took a step after I'd slipped them on my little toes, and a pair of heavy silver anklets with a fringe of silver tassels that flowed down from the ankle to the floor and almost hid my feet and jingled every time I moved. On my right wrist I hung a gold slave bracelet with silver chains, each ending in a ball of somber-gleaming garnet, and over my left hand I slipped a heavy sand-moulded bracelet of silver that must have weighed a full half pound. I combed my hair straight back from my forehead, drawing it so tightly that there was not a trace of wave left in it, and then I braided it into a queue, lacing strands of imitation emeralds and garlands of white jasmine in the plait. When this was done I darkened my eyebrows with a cosmetic pencil, raising them and accenting their arch to the 'flying gull' curve so much admired in the East, and rubbed green eye-shadow upon my lids. Over my head I draped a long blue veil sewn thickly with silver sequins and crowned it

with a chaplet of yellow rosebuds. Last of all there was a heavy gold circlet like a clip-earring to go into my left nostril, and a single opal screw-earring to fasten in the right, giving the impression that my nose had been pierced for the jewels, and a tiny, star-shaped patch of red court plaster to fix between my brows like a caste mark.

"There is a saying clothes don't make the man, but it's just the opposite with a woman. When I'd put those Oriental garments on I *felt* myself an Eastern woman who had never known and never wished for any other life except that behind the purdah, and all I wished to do was cast myself prostrate before Kabanta, tell him he was my lord, my master and my god, and press my lips against the gold-embroidered tips of his red slippers till he gave me leave to rise. I was shaking as if with chill when I stepped from the little anteroom accompanied by the silvery chiming of my anklets and toe rings.

"Kabanta had set a fire glowing in a silver bowl before the Green God, and when I joined him he put seven sticks of sandalwood into my hands, telling me to walk around the brazier seven times, dropping a stick of the scented wood on the fire each time I made a circuit and repeating Hindu invocations after him. When this was done he poured a little scented water from a silver pitcher into my cupped hands, and this I sprinkled on the flames, then knelt across the fire from him with outstretched hands palm-upward over the blaze while I swore to love him, and him only, throughout this life and the seven cycles to come. I remember part of the oath I took: 'To be one in body and soul with him as gold and the bracelet or water and the wave are one.'

"When I had sworn this oath he slipped a heavy gold ring—this!—on my finger, and told me I was pledged to him for all time and eternity, that Siva the Destroyer was witness to my pledge and would avenge my falseness if I broke my vow. It was then for the first time I heard of the pischa, bhirta and preta, shahini and rakashasha. It all seemed horrible and fantastic as he told it, but I believed it implicitly—then." A little rueful smile touched her pale lips. "I'm afraid that I believe it now, too, sir; but for a little while I didn't, and so—so my poor lover is dead."

"Pauvre enfant," de Grandin murmured. *"Ma pauvre belle créature.* And then?"

"Then came the war. You know how little pretense of neutrality there was. Americans were crossing into Canada by droves to join up, and everywhere the question was not 'Will we get into it?' but 'When?' I could fairly see my lover in the gorgeous uniform of a risaldar lieutenant or captain in the Indian Army, leading his troop of wild Patans into battle, but Kabanta made no move. When our own boys were drafted he was deferred as a medical-student. At last I couldn't stand it any longer. One evening at the shore I found courage to speak. 'Master and Lord,' I asked him—we used such language to each other in private—'is it not time that you were belting on your sword to fight for freedom?'

" 'Freedom, White Blossom of the Moghra Tree?' he answered with a laugh. 'Who is free? Art thou?'

" 'Thou art my lord and I thy slave,' I answered as he had taught me.

" 'And are the people of my father's country free? You know that they are not. For generations they have groaned beneath the Western tyrant's lash. Now these European dogs are at each other's throats. Should I take sides in their curs' fight? What difference does it make to me which of them destroys the others?'

" 'But you're American,' I protested. 'The Japanese have attacked us. The Germans and Italians have declared war on us—'

" 'Be silent!' he commanded, and his voice was no longer the soft voice that I loved. 'Women were made to serve, not to advise their masters of their duty.'

" 'But, Kabanta—'

" 'I told you to be still!' he nearly shouted. 'Does the slave dare disobey her master's command? Down, creature, down upon your knees and beg my pardon for your insolence—'

" 'You can't be serious!' I gasped as he grasped me by the hair and began forcing my head down. We'd been playing at this game of slave and master—dancing girl and maharajah—and I'd found it amusing, even thrilling, after a fashion. But it had only been pretense—like a 'dress-up party' or the ritual of a sorority where you addressed someone you'd known since childhood as

Queen or Empress, or by some other high-sounding title, knowing all the while that she was just your next door neighbor or a girl with whom you'd gone to grammar school. Now, suddenly, it dawned on me that it had not been play with him. As thoroughly Americanized as he appeared, he was still an Oriental underneath, with all the Oriental's cynicism about women and all an Eastern man's exalted opinion of his own importance. Besides, he was hurting me terribly as he wound his fingers in my hair. 'Let me go!' I demanded angrily. 'How dare you?'

" 'How dare I? Gracious Mahadeva, hear the brazen Western hussy speak!' he almost choked. He drew my face close to his and asked in a fierce whisper, 'Do you know what you vowed that night at The Light of Asia?'

" 'I vowed I'd always love you, but—'

" 'You'd always love me!' he mocked. 'You vowed far more than that, my Scented Bower of Delight. You vowed that from that minute you would be my thing and chattel—vowed yourself to Siva as a voluntary offering, and accepted me as the God's representative. As Gods are to humanity, so am I to you, O creature lower than the dust. You're mine to do with as I please, and right now it pleases me to chastise you for your insolence.' Deliberately, while he held my head back with one hand in my hair, he drew one of his moccasins off and struck me across the mouth with its heel. I could feel a thin trickle of blood between my lips and the scream I was about to utter died in my throat.

" 'Down!' he commanded. 'Down on your face and beg for mercy. If you are truly penitent perhaps I shall forgive your insolence.'

"I MIGHT have yielded finally, for flesh and blood can stand only so much, and suddenly I was terribly afraid of him, but when I was almost beyond resistance we heard voices in the distance, and saw a light coming toward us on the beach. 'Don't think that I've forgiven you,' he told me as he pushed me from him. 'Before I take you back you'll have to walk barefoot across hot coals and abase yourself lower than the dust—'

"Despite the pain of my bruised lips I laughed. 'If you think I'll ever see you again, or let you come within speaking distance—' I began, but his laugh was louder than mine.

" 'If you think you can get away, or ever be free from your servitude to me, you'll find that you're mistaken,' he jeered. 'You are Siva's, and mine, for all eternity. My shadow is upon you and my ring is on your finger. Try to escape the one or take the other off.'

"I WRENCHED at the ring he'd put on my hand. It wouldn't budge. Again and again I tried to get it off. No use. It seemed to have grown fast to the flesh; the more I tried to force it off the tighter it seemed to cling, and all the time Kabanta stood there smiling at me with a look of devilish, goading derision on his dark handsome features. At last I gave up trying and almost fainting with humiliation and the pain from my bruised mouth I turned and ran away. I found my car in the parking lot and drove home at breakneck speed. I suppose Kabanta managed to get a taxi. I don't know. I never saw him again."

"Très bon," de Grandin nodded approval as she completed her story. "That is good. That is very good, indeed, *ma oisillone."*

"Is it?" the irony of her reply was razor-thin.

"Is it not?"

"It is not."

"Pourquoi? Nom d'un chameau enfumé! For why?"

"Because he kept his word, sir. His shadow *is* upon me and his ring immovably upon my finger. Last year I met Wade Hardison, and it was love at first sight. Not fascination nor physical attraction, but love, real love; the good, clean, wholesome love a man and woman ought to have for each other if they expect to spend their lives together. Our engagement was announced at Christmas, and—"

"Et puis?" he prompted as her voice broke on a soundless sob.

"Then I heard from Kabanta. It was a post card—just a common penny post card, unsigned and undated, and it carried just eleven words of message: 'When you remove the ring you are absolved from your

oath.' He hadn't signed it, as I said, but I knew instantly it was from him.

"I tried desperately to get the ring off, wound my fingers with silk, used soap and olive oil, held my hand in ice cold water —no use. It wouldn't budge. I couldn't even turn it on my finger. It is as if the metal had grown to my flesh and become part of me. I didn't dare tell anyone about it, they wouldn't have believed me, and somehow I didn't have the courage to go to a jeweler's and have it filed off, so . . ."

The silence that ensued lasted so long one might have thought the girl had fainted, but the short, irregular, spasmotic swelling of her throat told us she was fighting hard to master her emotion. At last:

"Two days ago," she whispered so low we had to bend to catch her words, "I had another note. 'He shall never call you his,' was all it said. There was no signature, but I knew only too well who the sender was.

"Then I told Wade about it, but he just laughed. Oh, if only I had had the courage to postpone our wedding Wade might be alive now. There's no use fighting against Fate," her voice rose to a thin thread of hysteria. "I might as well confess myself defeated, go back to Kabanta and take whatever punishment he cares to inflict. I'm hopelessly enmeshed, entrapped—ensnared! I am Siva's toy and plaything, and Kabanta is the Green God's representative!" She roused to a sitting posture, then fell back, burying her face in the pillow and shaking with heart-breaking sobs.

"Kabanta is a species of a cockroach, and Siva but an ape-faced piece of green stone," de Grandin answered in a hard, sharp voice. "I, Jules de Grandin tell you so, *Madamoiselle;* anon I shall say the same thing to them, but much more forcefully. Yes, certainly, of course."

"THAT dame's as nutty as a fruit cake," Costello confided as we left the Thurmond house. "She goes an' gits herself involved with one o' these here fancy Hindu fellies, an' he goes an' tells her a pack o' nonsense, an' she falls fer it like a ton o' brick. As if they wuz anny such things as Shivas an' shahinnies an' raytors an' th' rest o' it! Begob, I'd sooner belave in—"

"You and I do not believe, my friend," de Grandin interrupted seriously, "but there are millions who do, and the power of their believing makes a great force—"

"Oh, come!" I scoffed. "You never mean to tell us that mere cumulative power of belief can create hobgoblins and bugaboos?"

"Vraiment," he nodded soberly. "It is indeed unfortunately so, my friend. Thoughts are things, and sometimes most unpleasant things. Yes, certainly."

"Nonsense!" I rejoined sharply. "I'm willing to agree that Melanie could have been imposed on. The world is full of otherwise quite sane people who are willing to believe the moon is made of green cheese if they're told so impressively enough. I'll even go so far as to concede she thinks she can't get the ring off. We've all seen the cases of strange inhibitions, people who were convinced they couldn't go past a certain spot—can't go off the block in which they live, for instance. She's probably unconsciously crooked her finger when she tried to pull it off. The very fact she found excuses to put off going to a jeweler's to have it filed off shows she's laboring under a delusion. Besides, we all know those Hindus are adepts at hypnotism—"

"Ah, bah!" he broke in. "You are even more mistaken than usual, Friend Trowbridge. "Have you by any chance read *Darkness Out of the East* by our good friend John Thunstone?"

"No," I confessed, "but—"

"But be damned and stewed in boiling oil for Satan's supper. In his book Friend Thunstone points out that the rite of walking barefoot seven times around a living fire and throwing fuel and water on it while sacred *mantras* are recited is the most solemn manner of pronouncing an irrevocable oath. It is thus the neophyte is oath-bound to the service of the temple where she is to wait upon the gods, it is so when the wife binds herself forever to the service and subjection of her lord and husband. When that poor one performed that ceremony she undertook an oath-bound obligation which every Hindu firmly believes the gods themselves cannot break. She is pledged by fire and water for all time and eternity to the man who put the ring of Siva on her finger. While I talked to her I observed the amulet. It bears the device of a woman held in

unbreakable embrace by Four-Faced Siva, and under it is written in Hindustani, 'As the gods are to mankind so is the one to whom I vow myself to me. I have said it.'

"As for her having the ring filed off—she was wiser than she knew when she refrained from that."

"How d'ye mean?" Costello and I chorused.

"I saw an instance of it once in Goa, Portuguese India. A wealthy Portuguese planter's *femme de la main gauche* had an *affaire* with a Hindu while her protector was away on business. She was inveigled into taking such a vow as Mademoiselle Thurmond took, and into having such a ring slipped on her finger. When she would have broken with her Hindu lover and returned to her *pourvoyer* she too found the ring immovable, and hastened to a jeweler's to have it filed off. *Tiens,* the life went out of her as the gold band was sawn asunder."

"You mean she dropped dead of a stroke?" I asked.

"I mean she died, my friend. I was present at the autopsy, and every symptom pointed to snake bite—except the stubborn fact that there had been no snake. We had the testimony of the jeweler and his two assistants; we had the testimony of a woman friend who went with her to the shop. All were agreed there had been no snake near her. She was not bitten; she merely fell down dead as the gold band came off."

"O.K., sor; if ye say it, I'll belave it, even if I know 't'aint so," Costello agreed. "What's next?"

"I think we should go to the morgue. The autopsy should be complete by this time, and I am interested in the outcome."

DR. JASON PARNELL, the coroner's physician, fanned himself with a sheaf of death certificates, and mopped his streaming brow with a silk handkerchief. "I'm damned if I can make it out," he confessed irritably. "I've checked and rechecked everything, and the answer's the same each time. Only it doesn't make sense.""

"Qu'est-ce donc?" de Grandin demanded. "How do you say?"

"That youngster has no business being dead than you or I. There wasn't a God's-earthly thing the matter with him from a pathological standpoint. He was perfect. Healthiest specimen I ever worked on. If he'd been shot, stabbed or run down by a motor car I could have understood it; but here he is, as physiologically perfect as an athlete, with positively no signs of trauma of any sort—except that he's as dead as a herring."

"You mean you couldn't find a symptom—" I began, and he caught me up before I had a chance to finish.

"Just that, Trowbridge. You said it. Not a single, solitary one. There is no sign of syncope, asphyxia or coma, no trace of any functional or organic weakness. Dammit man, the fellow didn't die, he just stopped living—and for no apparent reason. What'n hell am I goin' to tell the jury at the inquest?"

"Tiens, mon ami, that is your problem, I damn think," de Grandin answered. "We have one of our own to struggle with. There is that to do which needs immediate doing, and how we are to do it only *le bon Dieu* knows. Name of a little blue man, but it is the enigma, I tell you."

Sergeant Costello looked unhappily from Parnell to de Grandin. "Sure, sors, 'tis th' screwiest business I've ever seen entirely," he declared. "First th' pore young felley topples over dead as mutton, then his pore forsaken bride tells us a story as would make th' hair creep on yer neck, an' now you tell us that th' pore lad died o' nothin' a-tall. Mother o' Moses, 'tis Jerry Costello as don't know if he's comin' or goin' or where from an' where to. Can I use yer 'phone, Doc?" he asked Parnell. "Belike th' bhoys at Headquarters would like to know what I'm about."

We waited while he dialed Headquarters, heard him bark a question, and saw a look of utter unbelief spread on his broad perspiring face as some one at the other end answered. "'T'ain't so!" he denied. "It couldn't be.

"We wuz just up to see her, an' she's as limp as a wet wash—"

"What is it, *mon Sergent?*" de Grandin asked. "Is it that—"

"Ye can bet yer bottom dollar it is, sor," the Sergeant cut in almost savagely. "It sure is, or I'm a monkey's uncle. Miss Thurmond, her we just seen layin' in th' bed so weak

she couldn't hold up her head, has taken it on th' lam!"

"*Diable!*" de Grandin shot back. "It cannot be."

"That's what I told 'em at Headquarters, sor, but they insist they know what they're a-talkin' about; an' so does her old man. 'Twas him as put the call in to be on th' lookout fer her. It seems she lay in a half stupor when we left her, an' they'd left her alone, thinkin' she might git a bit o' rest, when zingo! up she bounces, runs to th' garage where her car wuz parked, an' rushes down th' street like th' divil wuz on her trail."

"*Ha!*" de Grandin's hard, dry, barking laugh had nothing whatever to do with amusement. "*Ah-ha-ha!* I am the greatest stupid-head outside of a *maison de fous, mes amis.* I might have damn anticipated it! You say she ran as if the devil were behind her? *Mais non,* it is not so. He was before her. He called her and she answered his summons!"

"Whatever—" I began, but Costello caught the little Frenchman's meaning.

"Then phat th' divil are we waitin' fer, sor?" he demanded. "We know where he hangs out. Let's go an' peel th' livin' hide off 'im—"

"*Ma moi, cher Sergent,* you take the words out of my mouth," the small Frenchman shot back. "Come, Friend Trowbridge, let us be upon our way?"

"Where to?" I asked.

"Where to? Where in the foul name of Satan but to that so vile shop called The Light of Asia, where unless I am more greatly mistaken than I think the dove goes to a rendezvous with the serpent. Quickly. Let us hasten, let us rush; let us fly, *mes amis*!"

The rain that had been threatening since early afternoon came down in bucketsful as we crept slowly through East Fifty-sixth Street. It poured in miniature Niagaras from cornices and rolled-up awnings, the gutters were awash, the sidewalks almost ankle-deep with water.

"*Halte la!*" ordered de Grandin, and I edged the car close to the curb. "My friends, we are arrived. Be quiet, if you please, make no move unless I request it, and—" he broke off with a muttered "*nom d'un coq!*" as a wind-whipped awning sluiced a sudden flood of icy water over him, shook himself like a spaniel emerging from a pond, and laid his hand upon the brass knob of the highly varnished door.

AMAZINGLY the door swung open at his touch and we stepped into the dim interior of The Light of Asia.

The place was like a church whose worshipers had gone. The air was redolent of incense, the darkness was relieved by only a dim, ruddy light, and all was silent—no, not quite! At the far end of the long room a voice was singing softly, a woman's voice raised in a trembling, tear-heavy contralto:

"Since I, O Lord, am nothing unto thee,
See here thy sword, I make it keen and bright . . ."

"*Alons, mes enfants,* follow!" whispered Jules de Grandin as he tiptoed toward the rear of the shop.

Now the tableau came in view, clear-cut as a scene upon a stage. In an elevated niche like an altar place crouched a green stone image slightly larger than man's-size, the sightless eyes of its four faces staring out in cold, malevolent obliviousness. Below it, cross-legged on a scarlet cushion, his hands folded palm-upward in his lap, was a remarkably handsome young man dressed in an ornate Oriental costume, but these we passed by at a glance, for in the foreground, kneeling with her forehead pressed against the floor, was Melanie Thurmond dressed as she had been when she took her fateful vow and had the ring of Siva put upon her hand. Her hands were raised above her bowed head, and in them rested a long, curved scimitar, the ruddy lamplight gleaming on its jeweled hilt and bright blade with ominous redness.

"Forgive, forgive!" we heard her sob, and saw her beat her forehead on the floor in utter self-abasement. "Have pity on the worm that creeps upon the dust before thy feet—"

"Forgiveness shall be thine," the man responded slowly, "when dead kine crop the grass, when the naked rend their clothes and when a shining radiance becomes a void of blackness."

"Have mercy on the insect crawling at thy feet," the prostrate woman sobbed. "Have pity on the lowly thing—"

"Have done!" he ordered sharply. "Give me the sword."

She roused until she crouched upon her knees before him, raised the scimitar and pressed its blade against her lips and brow in turn, then, head bent low, held it out to him. He took it, balancing it between his hands for a moment, then drew a silk handkerchief from his sleeve and slowly began polishing the blade with it. The woman bent forward again to lay her brow against the floor between her outstretched hands, then straightened till she sat upon her crossed feet and bent her head back till her slender flowerlike throat was exposed. "I wait the stroke of mercy, Master and Lord," she whispered as she closed her eyes. " 'Twere better far to die at thy hands than to live cut off from the sunshine of thy favor. . . ."

There was something wrong with the green god. It could not tell quite what it was; it might have been a trick of light and shadow, or the whorls of incense spiraling around it, but I could have sworn its arms were moving and its fixed, immobile features changing expression.

There was something wrong with me, too. A feeling of complete inadequacy seemed to spread through me. My self-esteem seemed oozing out of every pore, my legs felt weak, I had an almost irresistible desire to drop upon my knees before the great green idol.

"Oom, mani padme hong!" de Grandin cried, his voice a little high and thin with excitement. *"Oom, man padme hong!"*

Why I did it I had no idea, but suddenly I echoed his invocation, at the top of my voice, *"Oom, mani padme hong!"*

Costello's rumbling bass took up the chant, and crying the unfamiliar syllables in chorus we advanced toward the seated man and kneeling woman and the great, green gloating idol. *"Oom, mani padme hong!"*

The man half turned and raised his hands in supplication to the image, but even as he did so something seemed to happen in the niche. The great green statue trembled on its base, swayed backward, forward—rocked as if it had been shaken by a sudden blast of wind, then without warning toppled from its embrasure, crushing the man seated at its feet as a dropped tile might crush a beetle.

FOR a long moment we stood staring at the havoc, the fallen idol lying athwart the crushed, broken body of the man, the blood that spread in a wide, ever-broadening pool about them, and the girl who wept through lowered lids and beat her little fists against her breast, unmindful of the tragedy.

"Quickly, my friends," bade de Grandin. "Go to the dressing room and find her clothes, then join me here.

"Oom, mani palme hong! the gods are dead, there is no power or potency in them, my little flower," he told the girl. *"Oom, mani padme hong!"* he bent and took her right hand in his, seizing the great ring that glowed upon her forefinger and drawing it away. *"Oom, mani padme hong!* The olden gods are powerless—they have gone back to that far hell from whence they hailed—" The ring came off as if it had been several sizes too large and he lifted her in his arms gently.

"Make haste, my friends," he urged. "None saw us enter; none shall see us leave. Tomorrow's papers will record a mystery, but there will be no mention of this poor one's name in it. Oh, be quick, I do beseech you!"

"Now," I demanded as I refilled the glasses, "are you going to explain, or must the Sergeant and I choke it out of you?"

The little laughter wrinkles at the outer corners of his eyes deepened momentarily. *"Non, mes amis,"* he replied, "violence will not be required, I assure you. First of all, I assume you would be interested to know how it was we overcame that green monstrosity and his attendant by your chant?"

"Nothin' less, sor," Costello answered. "Bedad, I hadn't anny idea what it meant, or why we sang it, but I'm here to say it sounded good to me—I got a kick out o' repeating it wid ye, but why it wuz I dunno."

"You know the history of Gautama Buddha, one assumes?"

"I niver heard o' him before, sor."

Suel dammage! However"—he paused to take a long sip from his glass, then—"here are the facts: Siddhartha Gautama Buddha

was born in India some five hundred years before the opening of our era. He grew up in a land priest-ridden and god-ridden. There was no hope—no pride of ancestry nor anticipation of immortality — for the great mass of the people, who were forever fixed in miserable existence by the rule of caste and the divine commands of gods whom we should call devils. Buddha saw the wickedness of this, and after years of meditation preached a new and hopeful gospel. He first denied the power of the gods by whose authority the priests held sway, and later denied their very existence. His followers increased by thousands and by tens of thousands; they washed the cursed caste marks from their foreheads, proclaimed themselves emancipated, denied the priests' authority and the existence of the gods by whom they had been terrorized and downtrodden for generations. Guatama Buddha, their leader, they hailed and honored with this chant: *'Oom, mani padme hong!*—Hail, thou Gem of the Lotus!' From the Gulf of Bengal to the Himalayas the thunder of their greeting to their master rolled like a mighty river of emancipation, and the power of it emptied the rock temples of the olden deities, left the priests without offerings on which to fatten. Sometimes it even overthrew the very evil gods themselves. I mean that literally. There are recorded instances where bands of Buddhists entering into heathen temples have by the very repetiton of *'Oom, mani padme hong!'* caused rock-hewn effigies of those evil forces men called Vishnu and Siva to topple from their altars. Yes, it is so.

"*En conséquence* tonight when I saw the poor misguided mademoiselle about to make a sacrifice of herself to that four-faced caricature of Satan I called to mind the greeting to the Lord Gautama which in olden days had rocked him and his kind from their high thrones, and raised the ancient battle cry of freedom once more. *Tiens,* he knew his master, that one. The Lord Gautama Buddha had driven him back to whatever hell-pool he and his kind came from in the olden days; his strength and power to drive him back was still potent. Did not you see it with your own four eyes, my friends?"

"U'm," I admitted somewhat grudgingly. "You think it was the power of the Green God that called Melanie back to The Light of Asia tonight?"

"Partly, beyond question. She wore his ring, and material things have great power on things spiritual, just as spiritual things have much influence on the material. Also it might well have been a case of utter frustration. She might have said in effect, 'What is the use?' Her lover had been killed, her hopes of happiness blasted, her whole world knocked to pieces. She might well have reasoned: 'I am powerless to fight against my fate. The strength of the Green God is too great. I am doomed; why not admit it; why struggle hopelessly and helplessly? Why not go to Kabanta and admit my utter defeat, the extinction of my personality, and take whatever punishment awaits me, even though it be death? Sooner or later I must yield. Why not sooner than later? To struggle futilely is only to prolong the agony and make his final triumph all the greater.' These things she may have said to herself. Indeed, did she not intimate as much to us when we interviewed her?

"Yes," he nodded like a china mandarin on a mantelpiece, "it is unquestionably so, my friends, and but for Jules de Grandin—and the Lord Gautama Buddha assisted by my good friends Trowbridge and Costello—it might have been that way. *Eh bien,* I and the Buddha, with your kind assistance, put an end to their fine schemes, did we not?"

"You seriously think it was the force of the Green God that killed Wade Hardison?' I asked.

"I seriously do, my friend. That and naught else. The Green One was a burning glass that focused rays of hatred as a lens does sunlight, and through his power the never-to-be-sufficiently-anathematized Kabanta was enabled to destroy the poor young Hardison completely.

HE STABBED a small, impressive forefinger at me. "Consider, if you please: What was the situation tonight? Siva had triumphed. He had received a blood-sacrifice in the person of the poor young Hardison; he was about to have another in the so unfortunate Mademoiselle Melanie, then *pouf* comes Jules de Grandin and Friend Trowbridge and Friend Costello to repeat the chant which in the olden days had driven

him from power. Before the potency of our chant to the Buddha the Green One felt his power ebbing slowly from him as he retreated to that far place where he had been driven aforetime by the Lord Gautama. And what did he do as he fell back? *Tenez,* he took revenge for his defeat on Kabanta. He cast the statue of himself—a very flattering likeness, no doubt — down from its altar place and utterly crushed the man who had almost but not quite enabled him to triumph. He was like a naughty child that kicks or bites the person who has promised it a sweet, then failed to make good the promise—"

"But that idol was a senseless piece of carved stone," I protested. "How could it—"

"*Ah bah,* you irritate me, my friend. Of course the idol was a senseless piece of stone, but *that for which it stood was neither stone nor senseless.* The idol was but the representation of the evil power lurking in the outer darkness as the tiger lurks in ambush. Or let us put it this way: The idol is the material and visible door through which the spiritual and invisible force of evil we call Siva is enabled to penetrate into our human world.

Through that doorway he came into the world, through it he was forced to retreat before the power of our denial of his potency. So to speak, he slammed the door as he retreated—and caught Kabanta between door and jamb. *En tout cas,* he is dead, that miserable Kabanta. We are well rid of him, and the door is fast closed on the evil entity which he and the unwitting and unfortunate Mademoiselle Melanie let back into the world for a short time.

"Yes," he nodded solemnly again. "It is so. I say it. I also say that I should like my glass refilled, if you will be so gracious, Friend Trowbridge."

The Castle

By GLENN WARD DRESBACH

IF YOU ever intend to buy
A castle, inspect it well—
Though the walls be strong and high—
And hear what the old wives tell
Of it in the nearby town . . .
When you have been up, go down
To the secret rooms below
And if you find the places
Where chains had worn the walls,
And water, dripping slow
As time, has left deep traces
In stone where dim light falls,
It is not the place you wanted . . .
It will be forever haunted.
Something at the barred door!
At the high, barred windows, the moan
Of wind? . . . Where flesh before
Has suffered too much, never more
Is it alone.

Thorne on the Threshold

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

MR. GALLENDER, as superintendent of an asylum for the insane, was by training hard to daunt or embarrass. But he was not enjoying this final interview with a newly discharged patient. His round, kind face showed it.

"You are the second name on my list, doctor," Rowley Thorne told him across the desk in the office. "It is not a large list, but everyone implicated in my unjust confinement here shall suffer. You are second, I say, and I shall not delay long before giving you my attention." Thorne's lead-colored tongue moistened his lead-colored lips. "John Thunstone comes first."

"You're bitter," said Gallender, but neither his tone nor his smile were convincing. "It'll wear off after a day or so of freedom. Then you'll realize that I never bore you any ill-will or showed special discrimination. You were committed to this institution through the regular channels. Now that you've been re-examined and certified cured, I feel only happiness for you."

"Cured!" snorted Thorne. His great hairless dome of a head lifted like the turret of a rising submarine. His eyes gleamed above his hooked nose like the muzzles of the submarine's guns. "I was never insane. False testimony and stupid, arbitrary diagnosis landed me here. It's true that I had time in your institution to perfect various knowledges by meditation. Those knowledges will help me to deal with you all—as you deserve."

His eyes gleamed palely. Dr. Gallender drew himself up.

"You're aware," said the doctor, "that this kind of talk may well land you back in the ward from which you're being released. If I call for yet another board of examination—"

Heading by MATT FOX

Science calls it another dimension, mysticism calls it another plane, religion another existence—all call it evil!

Thorne sprang up from his chair. He was big and burly in his shabby clothes. He straightened to his full height, six feet and a little more. No, decided the doctor, six feet and considerably more. Six feet and a half—perhaps six feet seven—

"You're growing!" Gallender cried, his voice shrill with sudden baffled alarm.

"Call in your examiners." It was Thorne's voice, though his tight-clamped gash of a mouth did not seem even to twitch. "Call them in to see—to judge if I am crazy when I claim powers beyond anything you ever—"

He towered up and up, as if his wide slab shoulders would hunch against the ceiling. Dr. Gallender, cowering in his chair despite himself, thought a mist was thickening before his eyes in that quiet, brilliantly-lighted room. Rowley Thorne's fierce features churned, or seemed to churn and blur and writhe.

Next moment, abruptly, the illusion of height and distortion—if it was an illusion—flicked away. Rowley Thorne was leaning across the desk.

"Give me my release." He picked up the paper from in front of Dr. Gallender, who made no sound or motion to detain him. "If you're wise, you'll pray never to see me again. Except that prayer won't help you."

He tramped heavily out.

Left alone, Dr. Gallender picked up his telephone. Shakily he called Western Union, and shakily he dictated a wire. Then he rose and went to a wall cabinet, from which he took a glass and a bottle. Flouting one of his most rigid customs, he poured and drank whiskey in solitude, and it was a double drink at that. Then he poured another double drink.

But he collapsed before he could lift it to his mouth.

WHEN John Thunstone returned to New York from the south, his air would have puzzled even his few close friends. The drawn, wondering expression around deep dark eyes and heavy jaw was contradicted by the set of the giant shoulders and the vigorous stride that took him about the business he must now transact.

"Dr. Gallender's still in a coma," said the interne at the hospital. "Half a coma, anyway. He rouses to take nourishment when it's put to his mouth. He turns over from time to time, like a healthy sleeper. But his pulse and his involuntary reactions are feeble, and he doesn't voluntarily respond to voices or other stimuli more than once or twice a day. Diagnosis not yet complete."

"Which means that the doctors don't know what's the matter with him," summed up Thunstone. "Here's my authorization from his attending physician to see Dr. Gallender."

The interne reflected that he had heard somewhere how John Thunstone could secure authorization to do almost anything. He led the way along a hospital corridor and to the private room where the patient lay, quiet but not utterly limp. Gallender's face was pale, his eyes closed tightly, but he opened his mouth to allow a nurse to introduce a spoonful of broth.

Thunstone looked, a long strong forefinger stroking his cropped black mustache. Then he bent his giant body, his dark, well-combed head close to Gallender's.

"Dr. Gallender," said Thunstone, quietly but clearly. "Do you hear?"

It seemed that Gallender did hear. He closed his mouth again and lifted his head a dreamy, lanquid hair's-width from the pillow. Then he relaxed again.

"You can understand me," said Thunstone. "You sent me a warning wire. It was forwarded to me from New York. I hurried here at once, to learn about Rowley Thorne."

"Thorne," muttered Gallender, barely louder than a faint echo. "Said I would be second."

"You sent me a wire," repeated Thunstone, bending still closer. "I am John Thunstone."

"Thunstone," said Gallender, an echo even softer than before. "He will be first."

And Gallender subsided, with the gentlest of sighs. He did not open his mouth for more broth.

"He does not rouse more than that," volunteered the nurse. "It's like anaesthesia of some sort."

"He will be first, I will be second," said Thunstone under his mustache, as if to record the words on his memory. To the interne he said, "What's the full report on him?"

They stepped into the corridor again. "He was found unconscious in his office at the asylum," said the interne. "He had just re-

leased that man you mentioned, Rowley Thorne. Later a clerk came in and found him. There was some spilled liquor and at first they thought intoxication. Then poisoning. Now nobody knows. Thorne was checked by New York police, but there's no evidence to hold him."

"Did Thorne leave New York?"

"He gave a Greenwich Village address. The police have it. Apparently he's still there. Did you ever see a case like this, Mr. Thunstone? It's not quite human, somehow."

Thunstone glanced back through the doorway, eyeing the quiet form on the cot. "No, not quite human," he agreed slowly. "More like something similar among—insects."

Insects, Mr. Thunstone?"

"Tear open a wasp nest."

"Not while I'm in my right mind," demurred the interne, smiling slightly.

"In such nests," went on Thunstone, mildly lecturing, "you find other insects than wasps. Sometimes caterpillers, sometimes grubs, in some cases spiders. These strangers are always motionless. They've been stung into control by the wasps."

"Because the wasps lay their eggs in them," replied the interne. He shrugged his shoulders to show that he disliked the idea. "When the eggs hatch, the young start eating."

"But in the meantime," Thunstone said, "The prey remains alive but helpless, waiting the pleasure and plans of its conqueror." He looked at Gallender, once again. "I won't talk about hypnosis in its very derived forms, or about charms, spells and curses. You're studying medicine, and you'd better remain an empiricist. But don't worry about the patient unless you hear that I've been destroyed. And don't wait with your breath held to hear that, either. Goodbye, and many thanks.

HE LEFT. Outside it was evening, and he sought his hotel.

Knowing in a general sort of way what might be at the door of his room, Thunstone found it. A tiny fresh white bone from a toad or a lizard, bound with a bow of red silk floss and emitting a strange sickening smell, had been pushed into the keyhole. His key, thoughtlessly inserted, would have crashed the bone. Carefully Thunstone pried the grisly little object out, catching it in an envelope.

"Standard obeah device," he decided under his breath. "Some day I'll have time to do a real research and decide whether this is a primitive African method, as Seabrook and Hurston say, or a modification of European diabolism. Rowley Thorne will try anything."

Now he studied the jamb and threshold for possible smears of black liquid or scatterings of gray-white powder. He found neither, sighed with relief, and finally unlocked the door and let himself in.

He made two telephone calls, one to a police executive of his acquaintance who gave him Rowley Thorne's Greenwich Village address, the other to room service for dinner and a drink to be sent up. The waiter who brought the tray brought also a folded newspaper. "Left for you downstairs, sir," he told Thunstone. "Room clerk asked me to bring it to you."

"Thanks," said Thunstone. "Put it on the table."

When the man was gone, Thunstone took the salt shaker from the dinner tray and lightly sprinkled a few grains on the paper, watching closely, then took it up and unfolded it. On the upper margin was written a name he knew and which reassured him. He turned to the classified advertisements. Under "Personals" an item was circled:

> NEW THRESHOLD OF SPIRIT. You may glimpse truths beyond imagination. Demonstrations nightly, 8:45. Admission $1.

This was followed by an address, the same Thunstone had just learned from his friend of the police.

"Mmmm," said Thunstone, softly and slowly. He put the paper aside and turned to his dinner. He ate heartily, as always, but first he salted every mouthful. He even sprinkled a few grains in the brandy with which he finished.

When the waiter had taken away the dishes, Thunstone relaxed in his easiest chair. From a bureau drawer he produced a primitive-looking pipe with a bowl of dark blue stone, carved carefully with figures that looked like ideographs. It had been given

him, with reassurances as to its beneficent power, by Long Spear, a Tsichah Indian, a Phi Beta Kappa from a Southern university, and a practising medicine man of his tribe. Thunstone carefully filled the ancient bowl with tobacco mixed with kinnikinnik and, grimacing a bit—for he did not like the blend—smoked and smoked, blowing regular clouds in different directions.

When the pipe was finished, Thunstone wrote a letter. It began with the sentence: "If anything fatal or disabling overtakes me within the next few days, please act on the following information," and went on for several pages. When he had done and signed his name, he placed it in an envelope addressed to one Jules de Grandin at Huntingdon, New Jersey.

Now, from his lower drawer he produced a rectangular box the size of a dressing case, which showed neither keyhole nor draw-catch. By pressing at the middle of the lid, Thunstone made it fly open. Inside were several objects, closely packed, and from among them he selected a reliquary no more than two inches by three. It was of ancient brick-red clay, bound in silver, and its lid, too, must be pressed in a certain way to open.

From it Thunstone took a tiny silver bell, that clanged once as he lifted it, with a voice that might have deafened had it not been so sweetly clear. The bell was burnished white, but anyone could judge its age by the primitive workmanship. It had been carved, probably, from a block of metal, rather than cast or hammered. Upon it were carved two names, St. Cecelia and St. Dunstan, the patrons of music and of silversmithing; and a line of latin, in letters almost too fine too read:

Est mea cunctorum terror von daemoniorum.

"My voice is the terror of all demons," said Thunstone aloud.

Muffling the little thimble-sized object in his handkerchief, he stowed it in an inside pocket. By now it was nearly eight o'clock. He went out, mailed the letter, and signaled a taxi.

ONCE there had been two rooms in the apartment, one behind the other, perhaps for parlor and dining room. By the removal of the partition, these had become one room, a spacious oblong. Its dull walls were hung with gloomy-colored pictures and two hangings with crude but effective figures of men and animals embroidered upon them. At the rear had been built a platform a few inches above the floor level, its boards painted a flat brown. Upon this stood a square table covered with a black velvet cloth that fell to the platform itself. The front part of the room was filled with rows of folding chairs, as for a lecture audience, and fully fifty people sat there. Two candles on the velvet-covered table gave light enough to show the faces of the audience, some stupid, some rapt, some greedy, some apprehensive. There were more women than men, and more shabby coats than new ones.

A rear door opened and a woman appeared and mounted the platform. She was youngish and wore many bangles and scarfs. In the candle light her hair appeared to be rather blatantly hannaed. From the open door behind her stole soft, slow music, from a little organ or perhaps from a record on a phonograph. The woman faced the audience, her dark eyes big and questioning.

"Do you know why you are here?" she asked suddenly. "Is it for curiosity? Then you may wish you had not come. For worship? But you may not be ready. Because a call came to you that was more direct than what you have read or heard? That will be true for some of you."

Her wide eyes fluttered shut. "I am a medium, sensitive to spirits both alive and dead. I feel influences, and not all of them honest. In this room is a spy. He calls himself a journalist. Will he speak?"

There was some fidgeting and muttering, but nobody spoke. The woman's eyes opened, and fixed coldly on a young man in the rear of the room. "You," said the woman. "You came here to find something sensational or ridiculous to write about. Get out."

"I paid my dollar—" began the reporter.

"It is returned to you," she interrupted, and he flinched, then stared at a crumpled bit of paper that had sprung into view in his empty hand. "Go, I tell you."

"I have a right to stay," insisted the newspaper man, but even as he spoke he rose. It was an involuntary motion, as though he had been drawn erect by a noose of rope. Stumbling a little, he went to the door, opened it, and departed.

"Does anyone else come with enmity or a sneer?" challenged the woman on the platform. "I see a girl on the front row. She thought she would see or hear something tonight that would amuse her bridge club. She has her dollar back. Let her leave."

There was no protest this time. The girl rose and hurried out, clutching in her hand the bill that had come from nowhere.

"To the rest of you, I think, came a clear call," resumed the speaker. "Why else, do you think, you read a vague advertisement, and on the strength of it made a journey and paid money? I know your hearts—or enough of them to feel that you will listen. All I have said is mere preparation, as though I had swept humbly with a broom before the man who will now show himself."

She turned toward the door and nodded, or perhaps bowed a little in reverence. Rowley Thorne appeared, and took her place on the platform. The music stopped. There was absolute silence.

Rowley Thorne stood behind the table, leaning a little forward with his hands on the velvet cover, so that he had a candle on each side of him. He held himself rigid, as if to photograph himself on the attentions of those who watched—a man in dark clothes, of great width, with a chest like a keg and a squat-set hairless head. The candle-glow from beneath his face undershot him with light and made strange shadows with the jut of his chin and brows, the beaky curve of his big nose above his hard-slashed mouth. His eyelids did not flutter, but his gunmetal eyes roved restlessly, as though searching every face in the audience.

"Watch me," he bade after some seconds.

TO THOSE who watched he seemed to be floating closer. But that was only an illusion; he had spread his shoulders and chest, so that they filled more closely the space between the candles. His features, too, broadened and turned heavy like the memorial sculptures sometimes carved gigantically on granite bluffs. Like a face of granite his face maintained a tense immobility, as though Rowley Thorne must strive to keep it still. He grew. He was size and a half now, and swelling. Abruptly his face lost control, writhing and blurring, and he lifted his hands from the table to straighten himself.

There were those in the audience who wanted to move—toward Thorne, or away from him, or to fall on the floor. But none moved, and none felt that they could move. Thorne rose like a magnifying image on a cinema screen, higher and more misty, seeming to quiver and gesture madly as though in a spasm of agony. One person, or perhaps two, thought he was being lifted on an elevator apparatus concealed behind the velvet-draped table. But then he had stepped sidewise into full view. No doubts were possible now, he stood upon great columns of legs, a gigantic and grotesque figure out of proportion beyond any agromegalic freak in a side show. His eyes glared as big as peeled eggs, his mouth opened like the gaping of a valise, and his hand like a great spading fork moved toward the candle flames. At its slap they went out, and there was intense darkness in the room.

Quiet in that darkness, save for a woman in the audience who was trying to stifle sobs. Then the candles blazed up again. The henna-haired opener of the program had come back through the rear door and was holding a twisted spill of paper to light the two tags of radiance. Rowley Thorne leaned against the wall at the rear of the platform, gasping and sagging as though after a staggering effort. He was back to his own proportions again.

"I did that, not to startle you, but to convince you," he said between great gulps of air. "Does anyone here doubt that I have power? I have stood on the threshold of the unthinkable—but from the unthinkable I bring knowledge for anyone who cares to ask. Question, anyone? Question?"

The woman who had sobbed stood up. "I came to learn what happened to my sister. She quarrelled with her parents and left, and we couldn't trace—"

"Write to Cleveland," bade Rowley Thorne, his breathing even now. "Write to Dr. J. J. Avery, on East Twenty-third Street. He will tell you how your sister died."

"Died!" echoed the woman faintly, and sat down abruptly.

"Next question," said Rowley Thorne.

It came from another woman, who had lost an emerald-set bracelet that she called a family heirloom. Thorne directed her to search in a locked trunk in her attic, looking for a discarded red purse which held the

jewel. After that came a question from a grizzled oldster about Bronx politics, which Thorne settled readily but with patent disdain. A young man's query as to whether he should marry the girl he had in mind drew from Thorne a simple "Never," staccato but leering. There were other questions, each answered readily, convincingly, and more than often the reply was discouraging. But Rowley Thorne was plain telling each questioner the truth, the truth that he had dredged up from somewhere unknown.

WHEN no more voices ventured, Rowley Thorne permitted himself to show one of his smiles, all hard mouth and no eyes. "This has been a first meeting of what may be a communion of help and knowledge," he said, vague and encouraging. "All who stayed had belief and sympathy. You will be welcome another time, and perhaps more things will be revealed."

He paused on exactly the proper note of half-promise. He bowed in dismissal. The people rose from their seats and filed out, murmuring to each other.

When the door closed, Thorne turned to his henna-haired companion. "You got the names?"

"Each as they stood up to speak," she nodded, above a pencilled list. "I took each name as the person came in, and checked them in their seats. Nobody saw me writing. Their attention was all for you."

"Good." He took the paper from her. "I count eleven who brought up private matters they might better have kept to themselves. And even the smallest inquiry was admission of—"

He broke off, glaring into the remote rear corner, where lounged a human bulk as great as his own.

"Continue," said the voice of John Thunstone. "I am listening with the deepest interest."

Thorne and his companion faced savagely toward the big man. The red-haired woman drew herself up. "How did you come here?" she demanded tremulously. "And how did you remain without my knowledge?"

"Your mind-reading powers are not as perfect as you think," replied Thunstone, rising from where he sat. "When I was a boy I learned to think behind a wall. The untrained minds of the others were open to you, you could detect mockery and enmity and banish those who felt it. Meanwhile I had slipped in with the crowd and sat in this dimmest corner." He addressed Thorne. "Why did you break off. You were going to say you had a hold on all who listened to you here."

Thorne's lips twitched thinly and moistly. "I venture to remind you that you are a trespasser in a lodgings leased by myself. If something tragic happened to you, the law would reckon it no more than justified by your intrusion."

"Law!" echoed Thunstone, walking toward him.

He and Thorne were very much of a size. Each grinned with his lips and gazed with hard, watchful eyes. The red-haired woman glanced from one to the other in plain terror.

"Law, Thorne!" said Thunstone again. "You have a sound respect for such as help you. I know of nobody more bound by rules than yourself. A hold, I was saying, on those who heard and saw your performance tonight. That checks almost exactly with what I foresaw."

"You know so little that we pity you," taunted the red-haired woman.

"Store up your pity for your own needs," Rowley Thorne told her. "Thunstone does not consider himself a pitiable figure. I permit him to go on talking, for a little while."

"The classic demonologists," Thunstone continued, "agree that those who attend evil ceremonies and do not protest or rebel are therefore sealed communicants of black worship. You've collected the beginnings of a following, haven't you, Thorne? You're already planning how to rivet your hold on every person—on this one by fear, on that one by favor, on the other by blackmail."

"I'm able to stand alone," growled Thorne deeply.

"But those you serve demand worshippers, and you must see to the supply. You have failed before. I know, because I caused the failure. I have disrupted your ceremonies, burned your books, discredited and disgraced you." Thunstone's hard smile grew wider. "I am your bad luck, Thorne."

The red-haired woman had stooped, twitching up her skirt. From a sheath strapped to her leg she drew a slim dagger, but paused, staring at it. "It's broken," she muttered.

"Even your tools fail you," pronounced Thunstone.

Thorne, still standing on the dais, drew a deep breath. It swelled him like a hollow figure of rubber.

The woman stared at him, gasped, and drew away. She could not accustom herself to the phenomenon. Thunstone smiled no longer as he stepped up on the dais, close to Thorne.

"I'm not afraid of you in any size or shape," he said.

AROUND Thunstone the air was close and hot, as though he had entered a cave in the side of a volcano. The dimness of the room seemed to take on a murky red glow, but in that glow Thorne's face and outline grew no clearer. He only swelled. He was already a head taller than Thunstone.

"Moloch, Lucifer, Pemeoth," Thorne was saying, as though to someone behind him, "Anector, Somiator, sleep ye not."

"It is the unknown that terrifies," rejoined Thunstone, as though speaking a rehearsed line in response to a cue. "I know those names and for what beings they stand. I am not afraid."

"Awake, strong Holaha," chanted Thorne. "Powerful Eabon, mighty Tetragramaton. Athe, Stoch, Sada, Erohye!"

Thunstone felt around him the thickening, stifling heat, sensed the deepening of the red glow. There was a crackle in the air as of flames on the driest day of summer. How true, mused Thunstone while he fixed his eyes on the burgeoning form of his enemy, was the instinct of the primitive priest who first described hell as a place of gloomy fires. . . .

Hands were reaching for Thunstone, hands as large as platters. Thunstone smiled again.

"Do you think I am afraid?" he inquired gently, and stepped forward within reach of the hands.

A chorus of voices howled and jabbered, like men trying to sound like animals, or like animals trying to sound like men. Thorne's great gouty fingers had seized Thunstone's shoulders, and swiftly released their grip, while Thorne cursed as if in sudden pain. For Thunstone had seized the crumpled sleeves upon the mighty ridged arms, twisting them so that they bound and constricted like tourniquets. Thunstone's clutch could not be broken.

Thorne's hugeness above him heaved and struggled. But it did not seem to have gained weight in proportion to its size. Thunstone's own solidity anchored it down. "To me!" Thorne was blaring. "To me, you named and you nameless!"

They rallied to his call. Thunstone felt blinded, and at the same time dazzled, by that hot redness; but beings were there, many and near, around him. He clung to the sleeves he had grasped, and Thorne could not break away. Stifled, numbed, Thunstone yet summoned his strength, and with a mighty wrench toppled Thorne's overgrown form to its knees. That was enough for the moment. He let go and drove a hand under his coat to the inside pocket.

With a full-armed sweep, he swung the little silver bell.

IT'S voice, unthinkably huge as the master chime of a great carillon, rang joyously in that dark lost corner. It drowned the voices that howled at it. It clanged them into dismayed silence, and they shrank from it. Thunstone knew that they shrank, though mercifully he could not see them plainly. They retreated, and with them ebbed the redness and the numbness, and the breathless heat. Thorne was trying to say something, either defiant or pleading, from farther away and farther still. The bell drowned his speech, too. Things became plainer to the eye now, the room was just an ordinary dim room. Thunstone looked for Thorne, and saw him and saw through him, just as the giant outline faded like an image from a screen when the projector's light winks out.

Thunstone stood quiet a moment, breathing deeply. He cuddled the little bell in his palm to muffle its voice, and gazed at it with gratitude.

"I remember part of the old Hymn of the Bell," he said aloud. "'I call the people, I summon the clergy; I weep the departed, I put the pestilence to flight, I shatter the thunderbolts, I proclaim the Sabbaths.'" He looked around for the red-haired woman. "A holy man whom once I helped gave me this bell as a gift. It was made long ago, he told me, to exorcise evil spirits. This is

the third time I have used it successfully."

Carefully he returned the bit of silver to his pocket. Stepping from the dais, he walked across the room and switched on a light that threw white brilliance everywhere. Turning his head, he looked hard for some sign that Rowley Thorne had been there. There was none. Tramping a few steps more, John Thunstone opened two windows.

"This place smells most unoriginally of burning," he commented.

The red-haired woman crouched motionless in the farthest corner from the dais where Thunstone and Thorne had stood together. Stooping above her, Thunstone touched her shoulder. She looked up at him, and rose slowly. Her face was as pale as tallow.

"What will you do with me?" she managed to ask.

"Leave you to think how narrowly you escaped," he replied. "You were not a lieutenant of Thorne, only his servitor. Plainly you know little or nothing of what he was really trying to do. I recommend that you review the story of the sorcerer's apprentice, and keep clear in the future of all supernatural matters. For you have used up a good deal of your normal luck in escaping tonight."

"But what—what—" she stammered.

"The explanation is simple, if you care to accept it. Thorne was on the threshold of —something. Science calls it another dimension, mysticism calls it another plane, religion calls it another existence. He could communicate with entities beyond, and claim them for allies. He was able to draw some powers and knowledges, such as his ability to prophesy to those dupes who came. Such powers might have been useful to him, and rankly terrible to the normal world." Thunstone produced his pipe. "By the way, I am heartily in favor of the normal world."

Nearby stood a telephone on a bracket. Without asking permission, Thunstone picked it up and dialed a number. The nurse who answered told him jubilantly that Dr. Gallender had suddenly awakened from his trance, very lively, cheerful and hungry.

"Congratulate him for me," said Thunstone, "and say that I'll join him in a late supper."

He hung up and continued his explanation.

"Thorne gambled everything when he called his allies into this normal region of life to help him. I wanted him to do that. Because, when defeated, they would go back. And with them they would take Thorne. I don't dare hope that he's gone for good, but he'll have considerable difficulty in returning to us."

"But where?" pleaded the woman. "Where did he go?"

"The lesson to be learned from all I have said and done," Thunstone assured her gently, "is not to inquire into such things."

The Poems

By ***RAY BRADBURY***

IT STARTED out to be just another poem. And then David began sweating over it, stalking the rooms, talking to himself more than ever before in the long, poorly-paid years. So intent was he upon the poem's facets that Lisa felt forgotten, left out, put away until such time as he finished writing and could notice her again.

Then, finally—the poem was completed. With the ink still wet upon an old envelope's back, he gave it to her with trembling fingers, his eyes red-rimmed and shining with a hot, inspired light. And she read it.

"David—" she murmured. Her hand began to shake in sympathy with his.

The square of paper was a brilliantly sunlit casement through which one might gaze into another and brighter land

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

"It's *good,* isn't it?" he cried. Damn good!"

The cottage whirled around Lisa in a wooden torrent. Gazing at the paper she experienced sensations as if words were melting, flowing into animate things. The paper was a square, brilliantly sunlit casement through which one might lean into another and brighter amber land! Her mind swung pendulum-wise. She had to clutch, crying out fearfully, at the ledges of this incredible window to support herself from being flung headlong into three-dimensional impossibility!

"David, how strange and wonderful and —*frightening.*"

It was as if she held a tube of light cupped in her hands, through which she could race into a vast space of singing and color and new sensation. Somehow, David had caught up, netted, skeined, imbedded reality, substance, atoms—mounting them upon paper with a simple imprisonment of ink!

He described the green, moist verdure of the dell, the eucalyptus trees and the birds flowing through their high, swaying branches. And the flowers cupping the propelled humming of bees.

"It *is* good, David. The very finest poem you've ever written!" She felt her heart beat swiftly with the idea and urge that came to her in the next moment. She felt that she must see the dell, to compare its quiet contents with those of this poem. She took David's arm. "Darling, let's walk down the road—now."

In high spirits, David agreed, and they set out together, from their lonely little house in the hills. Half down the road she changed her mind and wanted to retreat, but she brushed the thought aside with a move of her fine, thinly sculptured face. It seemed ominously dark for this time of day, down there toward the end of the path. She talked lightly to shield her apprehension:

"You've worked so hard, so long, to write the perfect poem. I knew you'd succeed some day. I guess this is it."

"Thanks to a patient wife," he said.

They rounded a bend of gigantic rock and twilight came as swiftly as a purple veil drawn down.

"David!"

In the unexpected dimness she clutched and found his arm and held to him. "What's happened? Is this the dell?"

"Yes, of course it is."

"But, it's so dark!"

"Well—yes—it is—" He sounded at a loss.

"The flowers are gone!"

"I saw them early this morning; they can't be gone!"

"You wrote about them in the poem. And where are the grapé vines?"

"They *must* be here. It's only been an hour or more. It's too dark. Let's go back." He sounded afraid himself, peering into the uneven light.

"I can't find anything, David. The grass is gone, and the trees and bushes and vines, all gone!"

She cried it out, then stopped, and it fell upon them, the unnatural blank spaced silence, a vague timelessness, windlessness, a vacuumed sucked out feeling that oppressed and panicked them.

He swore softly and there was no echo. "It's too dark to tell now. It'll all be here tomorrow."

"But what if it *never* comes back?" She began to shiver.

"What are you raving about?"

She held the poem out. It glowed quietly with a steady pure yellow shining, like a small niche in which a candle steadily lived.

"You've written the perfect poem. Too perfect. That's what you've done." She heard herself talking, tonelessly, far away.

She read the poem again. And a coldness moved through her.

"The dell is here. Reading this is like opening a gate upon a path and walking knee-high in grass, smelling blue grapes, hearing bees in yellow transits on the air, and the wind carrying birds upon it. The paper dissolves into things, sun, water, colors and life. It's not symbols or reading any more, it's LIVING!"

"No," he said. "You're wrong. It's crazy."

THEY ran up the path together. A wind came to meet them after they were free of the lightless vacuum behind them.

In their small, meagerly furnished cottage they sat at the window, staring down

at the dell. All around was the unchanged light of mid-afternoon. Not dimmed or diffused or silent as down in the cup of rocks.

"It's not true. Poems don't work that way," he said.

"Words are symbols. They conjure up images in the mind."

"Have I done more than that?" he demanded. "And how did I do it, I ask you?" He rattled the paper, scowling intently at each line. "Have I made more than symbols with a form of matter and energy. Have I compressed, concentrated, dehydrated life? Does matter pass into and through my mind, like light through a magnifying glass to be focussed into one narrow, magnificent blazing apex of fire? Can I etch life, burn it onto paper, with that flame? Gods in heaven, I'm going mad with thought!"

A wind circled the house.

"If we are not crazy, the two of us," said Lisa, stiffening at the sound of the wind, "there is one way to prove our suspicions."

"How?"

"Cage the wind."

"Cage it? Bar it up? Build a mortar of ink around it?"

She nodded.

"No, I won't fool myself." He jerked his head. Wetting his lips, he sat for a long while. Then, cursing at his own curiosity, he walked to the table and fumbled self-consciously with pen and ink. He looked at her, then at the windy light outside. Dipping his pen, he flowed it out onto paper in regular dark miracles.

Instantly, the wind vanished.

"The wind," he said. "It's caged. The ink is dry."

OVER his shoulder she read it, became immersed in its cool heady current, smelling far oceans tainted on it, odors of distant wheat acres and green corn and the sharp brick and cement smell of cities far away.

David stood up so quickly the chair fell back like an old thin woman. Like a blind man he walked down the hill toward the dell, not turning, even when Lisa called after him, frantically.

When he returned he was by turns hysterical and immensely calm. He collapsed in a chair. By night, he was smoking his pipe, eyes closed, talking on and on, as calmly as possible.

"I've got power now no man ever had. I don't know its extensions, its boundaries or its governing limits. Somewhere, the enchantment ends. Oh, my god, Lisa, you should see what I've done to that dell. Its gone, all gone, stripped to the very raw primordial bones of its former self. And the beauty is here!" He opened his eyes and stared at the poem, as at the Holy Grail. "Captured forever, a few bars of midnight ink on paper! I'll be the greatest poet in history! I've always dreamed of that."

"I'm afraid, David. Let's tear up the poems and get away from here!"

"Move away? Now?"

"It's dangerous. What if your power extends beyond the valley?"

His eyes shone fiercely. "Then I can destroy the universe and immortalize it at one and the same instant. It's in the power of a sonnet, if I choose to write it."

"But you *won't* write it, promise me, David?"

He seemed not to hear her. He seemed to be listening to a cosmic music, a movement of bird wings very high and clear. He seemed to be wondering how long this land had waited here, for centuries perhaps, waiting for a poet to come and drink of its power. This valley seemed like the center of the universe, now.

"It would be a magnificent poem," he said, thoughtfully. "The most magnificent poem ever written, shamming Keats and Shelley and Browning and all the rest. A poem about the universe. But no." He shook his head sadly. "I guess I won't ever write that poem."

Breathless, Lisa waited in the long silence.

Another wind came from across the world to replace the one newly imprisoned. She let out her breath, at ease.

"For a moment I was afraid you'd overstepped the boundary and taken in all the winds of the earth. It's all right now."

"All right, hell," he cried, happily. "It's marvelous!"

And he caught hold of her, and kissed her again and again.

Fifty poems were written in fifty days.

Poems about a rock, a stem, a blossom, a pebble, an ant, a dropped feather, a raindrop, an avalanche, a dried skull, a dropped key, a fingernail, a shattered light bulb.

Recognition came upon him like a rain shower. The poems were bought and read across the world. Critics referred to the masterpieces as "—chunks of amber in which are caught whole portions of life and living—" "—each poem a window looking out upon the world—"

He was suddenly a very famous man. It took him many days to believe it. When he saw his name on the printed books he didn't believe it, and said so. And when he read the critics columns he didn't believe them either.

Then it began to make a flame inside him, growing up, climbing and consuming his body and legs and arms and face.

Amidst the sound and glory, she pressed her cheek to his and whispered:

"This is your perfect hour. When will there ever be a more perfect time than this? Never again."

He showed her the letters as they arrived.

"See? This letter. From New York." He blinked rapidly and couldn't sit still. "They want me to write more poems. Thousands more. Look at this letter. Here." He gave it to her. "That editor says that if I can write so fine and great about a pebble or a drop of water, think what I can do when I —well experiment with real life. Real life. Nothing big. An amoeba perhaps. Or, well, just this morning, I saw a bird—"

"A bird?" She stiffened and waited for him to answer.

"Yes, a hummingbird—hovering, settling, rising—"

"You didn't . . . ?"

"Why NOT? Only a bird. One bird out of a billion," he said self-consciously. "One little bird, one little poem. You can't deny me that."

"One amoeba," she repeated, tonelessly. "And then next it will be one dog, one man, one city, one continent, one universe!"

"Nonsense." His cheek twitched. He paced the room, fingering back his dark hair. "You dramatize things. Well, after all, what's one dog, even, or to go one step further, one man?"

She sighed. "It's the very thing you talked of with fear, the danger we spoke of that first time we knew your power. Remember, David, it's not really yours, it was only an accident our coming here to the valley house—"

He swore softly. "Who cares whether it was accident or Fate? The thing that counts is that I'm here, now, and they're—they're—" He paused, flushing.

"They're what?" she prompted.

"They're calling me the greatest poet who ever lived!"

"It'll ruin you."

"Let it ruin me, then! Let's have silence, now."

He stalked into his den and sat restlessly studying the dirt road. While in this mood, he saw a small brown dog come patting along the road, raising little dust-tufts behind.

"And a damn good poet I am," he whispered, angrily, taking out pen and paper. He scratched out four lines swiftly.

The dog's barking came in even shrill intervals upon the air as it circled a tree and bounded a green bush. Quite unexpectedly, half over one leap across a vine, the barking ceased, and the dog fell apart in the air, inch by inch, and vanished.

Locked in his den, he composed at a furious pace, counting pebbles in the garden and changing them to stars simply by giving them mention, immortalizing clouds, hornets, bees, lightning and thunder with a few pen flourishes.

It was inevitable that some of his more secret poems should be stumbled upon and read by his wife.

Coming home from a long afternoon walk he found her with the poems lying all unfolded upon her lap.

"David," she demanded. "What does this mean?" She was very cold and shaken by it. "This poem. First a dog. Then a cat, some sheep and—finally—a man!"

He seized the papers from her. "So what!" Sliding them in a drawer, he slammed it, violently. "He was just an old man, they were old sheep, and it was a microbe-infested terrier! The world breathes better without them!"

"But here, THIS poem, too." She held it straight out before her, eyes widened. "A

woman. Three children from Charlottesville!"

"All right, so you don't like it!" he said, furiously. "An artist has to experiment. With everything! I can't just stand still and do the same thing over and over. I've got greater plans than you think. Yes, really good, fine plans. I've decided to write about everything. I'll dissect the heavens if I wish, rip down the worlds, toy with suns if I damn please!"

"David," she said, shocked.

"Well, I will! I will!"

"You're such a child, David. I should have known. If this goes on, I can't stay here with you."

"You'll have to stay," he said.

"What do you mean?"

He didn't know what he meant himself. He looked around, helplessly and then declared, "I mean. I mean—if you try to go all I have to do is sit at my desk and describe you in ink . . ."

"You . . ." she said, dazedly.

She began to cry. Very silently, with no noise, her shoulders moved, as she sank down on a chair.

"I'm sorry," he said, lamely, hating the scene. "I didn't mean to say that, Lisa. Forgive me." He came and laid a hand upon her quivering body.

"I won't leave you," she said, finally.

And closing her eyes, she began to think.

IT WAS much later in the day when she returned from a shopping trip to town with bulging grocery sacks and a large gleaming bottle of champagne.

David looked at it and laughed aloud. "Celebrating, are we?"

"Yes," she said, giving him the bottle and an opener. "Celebrating you as the world's greatest poet!"

"I detect sarcasm, Lisa," he said, pouring drinks. "Here's a toast to the—the universe." He drank. "Good stuff." He pointed at hers. "Drink up. What's wrong?" Her eyes looked wet and sad about something.

She refilled his glass and lifted her own. "May we always be together. Always."

The room tilted. "It's hitting me," he observed very seriously, sitting down so as not to fall. "On an empty stomach I drank. Oh, Lord!"

He sat for ten minutes while she refilled his glass. She seemed very happy suddenly, for no reason. He sat scowling, thinking, looking at his pen and ink and paper, trying to make a decision. "Lisa?"

"Yes?" She was now preparing supper, singing.

"I feel in a mood. I have been considering all afternoon and—"

"And what, darling?"

"I am going to write the greatest poem in history—NOW!"

She felt her heart flutter.

"Will your poem be about the valley?"

He smirked. "No. No! Bigger than that. Much bigger!"

"I'm afraid I'm not much good at guessing," she confessed.

"Simple," he said, gulping another drink of champagne. Nice of her to think of buying it, it stimulated his thoughts. He held up his pen and dipped it in ink. "I shall write my poem about the universe! Let me see now . . ."

"David!"

He winced. "What?"

"Oh, nothing. Just, have some more champagne, darling."

"Eh?" He blinked fuzzily. "Don't mind if I do. Pour."

She sat beside him, trying to be casual. "Tell me again. What is it you'll write?"

"About the universe, the stars, the epileptic shamblings of comets, the blind black seekings of meteors, the heated embraces and spawnings of giant suns, the cold, graceful excursions of polar planets, asteroids plummeting like paramecium under a gigantic microscope, all and everything and anything my mind lays claim to! Earth, sun, stars!" he exclaimed.

"No!" she said, but caught herself. "I mean, darling, don't do it all at once. One thing at a time—"

"One at a time." He made a face. "That's the way I've been doing things and I'm tried to dandelions and daisies."

He wrote upon the paper with the pen.

"What're you doing?" she demanded, catching his elbow.

"Let me alone!" He shook her off.

She saw the black words form:

"Illimitable universe, with stars and planets and suns—"

She must have screamed.

"No, David, cross it out, before it's too late. Stop it!"

He gazed at her as through a long dark tube, and her far away at the other end, echoing. "Cross it out?" he said. "Why, it's GOOD poetry! Not a line will I cross out. I want to be a GOOD poet!"

She fell across him, groping, finding the pen. With one instantaneous slash, she wiped out the words.

"Before the ink dries, before it dries!"

"Fool!" he shouted. "Let me alone!"

SHE ran to the window. The first evening stars were still there, and the crescent moon. She sobbed with relief. She swung about to face him and walked toward him. "I want to help you write your poem—"

"Don't need your help!"

"Are you blind? Do you realize the power of your pen!"

To distract him, she poured more champagne, which he welcomed and drank. "Ah," he sighed, dizzily. "My head spins."

But it didn't stop him from writing, and write he did, starting again on a new sheet of paper:

"UNIVERSE — VAST UNIVERSE — BILLION STARRED AND WIDE—"

She snatched frantically at shreds of things to say, things to stave off his writing.

"That's poor poetry," she said.

"What do you mean 'poor'?" he wanted to know, writing.

"You've got to start at the beginning and build up," she explained logically. "Like a watch spring being wound or the universe starting with a molecule building on up through stars into a stellar cartwheel—"

He slowed his writing and scowled with thought.

She hurried on, seeing this. "You see, darling, you've let emotion run off with you. You can't start with the big things. Put them at the end of your poem. Build to a climax!"

The ink was drying. She stared at it as it dried. In another sixty seconds—

He stopped writing. "Maybe you're right. Just maybe you are." He put aside the pen a moment.

"I know I'm right," she said, lightly, laughing. "Here. I'll just take the pen and—there—"

She had expected him to stop her, but he was holding his pale brow and looking pained with the ache in his eyes from the drink.

She drew a bold line through his poem. Her heart slowed.

"Now," she said, solicitously, "you take the pen, and I'll help you. Start out with small things and build, like an artist."

His eyes were gray-filmed. "Maybe you're right, maybe, maybe."

The wind howled outside.

"Catch the wind!" she cried, to give him a minor triumph to satisfy his ego. "Catch the wind!"

He stroked the pen "Caught it!" he bellowed, drunkenly, weaving. "Caught the wind! Made a cage of ink!"

"Catch the flowers!" she commanded, excitedly. "Everyone in the valley! And the grass!"

"There! Caught the flowers!"

"The hill next!" she said.

"The hill!"

"The valley!"

"The valley!"

"The sunlight, the odors, the trees, the shadows, the house and the garden, and the things inside the house!"

"Yes, yes, yes," he cried, going on and on and on.

And while he wrote quickly she said, "David, I love you. Forgive me for what I do next, darling—"

"What?" he asked, not having heard her.

"Nothing at all. Except that we are never satisfied and want to go on beyond proper limits. You tried to do that, David, and it was wrong."

He nodded over his work. She kissed him on the cheek. He reached up and patted her chin. "Know what, lady?"

"What?"

"I think I like you, yes, sir, I think I like you."

She shook him. "Don't go to sleep, David, don't."

"Want to sleep. Want to sleep."

"Later, darling. When you've finished your poem, your last great poem, the very finest one, David. Listen to me—"

He fumbled with the pen. "What'll I say?"

She smoothed his hair, touched his cheek with her fingers and kissed him, tremblingly. Then, closing her eyes, she began to dictate:

"There lived a fine man named David and his wife's name was Lisa and—"

The pen moved slowly, achingly, tiredly forming words.

"Yes?" he prompted.

"—and they lived in a house in the garden of Eden—"

He wrote again, tediously. She watched.

He raised his eyes. "Well? What's next?"

She looked at the house, and the night outside, and the wind returned to sing in her ears and she held his hands and kissed his sleepy lips,

"That's all," she said, "the ink is drying."

THE publishers from New York visited the valley months later and went back to New York with only three pieces of paper they had found blowing in the wind around and about the raw, scarred, empty valley.

The publishers stared at one another, blankly:

"Why, why, there was nothing left at all," they said. "Just bare rock, not a sign of vegetation or humanity. The home he lived in—gone! The road, everything! *He* was gone! His wife, *she* was gone, too! Not a word out of them. It was like a river flood had washed through, scraping away the whole countryside! Gone! Washed out! And only three last poems to show for the whole thing!"

No further word was ever received from the poet or his wife. The Agricultural College experts traveled hundreds of miles to study the starkly denuded valley, and went away shaking their heads and looking pale.

But it is all simply found again.

You turn the pages of his last small thin book and read the three poems.

She is there, pale and beautiful and immortal; you smell the sweet warm flash of her, young forever, hair blowing golden upon the wind.

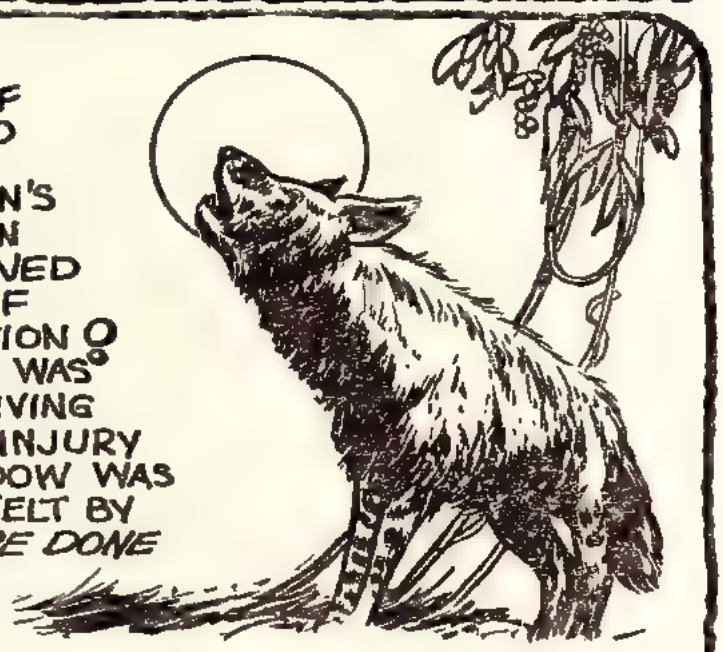
And next to her, upon the opposite page, he stands gaunt, smiling, firm, hair like raven's hair, hands on hips, face raised to look about him.

And on all sides of them, green with an imortal green, under a sapphire sky, with the odor of fat wine-grapes, with the grass knee-high and bending to touch of exploring feet, with the trails waiting for any reader who takes them, one finds the valley, and the house, and the deep rich peace of sunlight and of moonlight and many stars, and the two of them, he and she, walking through it all, laughing together, forever and forever.

SUPERSTITIONS AND TABOOS

by Hill

THE ANCIENTS OF ARABIA BELIEVED THAT IF A HYAENA TROD OVER A MAN'S SHADOW, THE MAN WOULD BE DEPRIVED OF THE POWER OF SPEECH AND MOTION. A MAN'S SHADOW WAS REGARDED AS A LIVING PART OF HIM AND INJURY DONE TO HIS SHADOW WAS SUPPOSED TO BE FELT BY HIM *AS IF IT WERE DONE TO HIS BODY*.



AT THE GREATEST YEARLY FESTIVAL OF THE AZTECS A YOUNG CAPTIVE WITH THE MOST PERSONAL BEAUTY WAS CHOSEN FOR SACRIFICE. HE WAS ESTEEMED AND WORSHIPPED AS A GOD FOR A WHOLE YEAR. AFTER THIS YEAR OF REVERENTIAL HOMAGE, HE WAS ESCORTED TO THE TEMPLE WHERE HE WAS SEIZED AND HELD DOWN ON HIS BACK. ONE OF THE PRIESTS THEN CUT OPEN THE VICTIMS BREAST AND THRUSTING HIS HAND INTO THE WOUND *WRENCHED OUT HIS HEART AND HELD IT UP IN SACRIFICE TO THE SUN*.

Tatiana

Such beauty could come only from beyond the farthest star

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

THEY'RE kind to me here, in their way, with an impersonal sort of kindness that has in it nothing of warmth. Today, when I asked for paper and ink, Myles, the attendant, clapped me on the shoulder. "Going to write a letter, h'm, Kerry? Well, that's fine. That's cer'nly fine." There was a time, earlier, when I had resented being patronized in this fashion. For this is an institution for the mentally afflicted.

And I am not insane.

But in the beginning I made the mistake of telling about Tatiana. Perhaps I did not tell it well. My head ached from the heavy air, thick with stale tobacco smoke; I was confused by the huge, hulking figures unseen, but sensed, beyond that bright white light. Somehow I must have garbled the story in the telling, and that is why they sent me here. With passing time I've grown convinced of this, and I've thought, "If I could only set it down in black and white, then maybe they'd see their mistake. Then

By HAROLD LAWLOR

maybe it would sound less like the raving of a lunatic."

So today I asked for paper and ink to write—not a letter, as Myles thought, but a story.

This story:

TIM and I first came upon her one rainrent November evening, huddled on the doorstep of our apartment house. She was crouched there in the attitude of Venner's *Magdalene,* the light from the foyer falling through the glass door, turning her uncovered golden red hair to a shimmering fall of molten copper.

There was no room to pass her rain-spattered polo-coated figure, as Tim, after an incurious glance, proceeded to do. But I stopped. It's strange now to remember that I was the one who stopped. For I was always the timid one. My twin brother, Tim, was the older (by ten minutes!) and it was as if this seniority had always given him the right to be the leader. Certainly he was invariably the aggressor in any situation. I was the quiet twin—the shy one, overlooked in the background.

But I stopped as if even then I sensed the eerie, other worldly quality that I will always associate with the memory of Tatiana. Later, too, I was to recall the curious reluctance with which Tim accepted her from the first. Almost as if he'd known that in her strange wake were to trail love and hate and conflict.

But now I bent over the girl. "Is anything the matter? Can we help you?"

Bright headlights danced on the coppery hair as she shook her head.

"Come on, Kerry!" Tim was clutching at my arm.

But I couldn't seem to take my eyes from the girl. "Can't we take you home?"

She lifted her head at that, and I was not surprised to see that her face lived up to the lovely promise of her hair.

"Where do you live?" I persisted, while Tim stood by, fuming.

Her eyes were long and green and inscrutable, and held neither appeal nor fright. She pointed vaguely. "Beyond the farthest star."

Even Tim was momentarily arrested by that. Then again he dragged insistently at my arm. Old habit reasserted itself. This time I no longer resisted, but prepared to follow in his lead. But before we could move away, the girl spoke.

"I'm Tatiana. I—" She broke off, looking faintly surprised. Then the green eyes rolled upward, and slowly she toppled outward toward the sidewalk.

I caught her just before her bright head would have struck the cement.

UPSTAIRS, in the living room, I set her down carefully on our shabby divan, and poured brandy from the precious bottle we'd been saving. But I needn't have. For she was sitting up, almost at once. So composedly, that Tim looked suspicious, and even I knew a momentary doubt.

"It's just—just that I'm hungry," she said apologetically.

I nodded, knowing she spoke the truth. That greenish-white pallor couldn't be faked. I looked over to where Tim was lounging alertly, warily, against the door frame. "Would you mind, Tim? There ought to be an egg or two in the icebox. And would you make some coffee?"

Even then I remember thinking. "Imagine me, giving Tim orders!"

He said nothing. He just looked at me, and I knew my life would be a minor hell for days. Tim could be mean in so many little ways. But now he went kitchenward. And, looking at the girl, I felt indifferent for once to Tim's uncertain temper.

"We eat out mostly," I explained to the girl, who'd been watching us in silence. "Everything is strictly from bachelorhood around here. I'm Kerry Murnane." I nodded toward the door through which Tim had disappeared. "And that's my twin brother, Tim."

"Yes." She nodded, almost as if she'd known. "Tim, he does not like me. But you—" She regarded me sagely. "I think you will come to love me. And what Tatiana thinks, comes true."

Well! I blinked. But her slanted green eyes semed to hold no guile.

I said, faintly amused. "And you knelt there in the rain knowing—I would come along?"

"Oh, no." The shining hair dusted her shoulders. "I thought, 'I will rest here, and —*somebody* nice will come along.' And—" Her slim hands solemnly tossed the unfinished statement into the air.

Evidently I was to infer that what she'd thought had come true. The girl was being ridiculous, merely. Then why should I know this vague, mounting sense of alarm?

She was smiling secretively as she stood up and slipped off the polo-coat to reveal a simple, unadorned black dress beneath. It was tight over her tilted breasts and rounded hips, and her waist was incredibly small.

Idiotically, I found myself wondering how it would feel to hold such loveliness in my arms. Idiotically, because I was not usually so quickly susceptible.

Luckily, Tim's voice called from the kitchen to cut through my ridiculous mood.

THOUGH obviously ravenous, the girl ate her scrambled eggs and toast as daintily as a cat, at once absorbed yet detached. Tim neglected his food, and was sunk in a seemingly sullen mood. As for me, I watched Tatiana, fascinated by I know not what about her. Watched, and listened to the rain tick-tocking against the window.

It was an odd scene. The three of us there in the small bright kitchen. The setting so strangely normal, the atmosphere suddenly so strangely sinister.

For it *was* sinister. A chill wind seemed to blow through the kitchen and I shivered slightly. That shiver we try to pass off lightly by laughing and saying, "Someone must be walking over my grave." There was something decidedly unpleasant in the air. It was as if we were waiting. Waiting for the tragedy that was on its way.

I stirred uncomfortably. Me and my wild Irish imagination!

When she'd drained the last of her second cup of coffee, Tatiana looked at us both, commanding attention.

"You have been very kind to a stranger. You shall find that Tatiana is not ungrateful."

Significantly, wordlessly enjoining our attention, she held out slim white hands, empty palms upward. Slowly she doubled them into fists, rested them against her forehead, closed her eyes.

"For Kerry, for Tim," she whispered. The rest was lost in soundless movement of her lips.

I was afraid to look at Tim, but I knew his left eyebrow must be climbing upward quizzically. And I knew his narrowed eyes would be hard, not on the girl, but on me for getting us into this.

Presently, with a Gioconda smile, Tatiana again extended her hands. Slowly she opened them.

Tim and I gaped together.

Resting on each white palm was something that resembled an unset diamond—diamonds whose facets reflected rainbow fragments from the overhead light.

"Take them," Tatiana said. "They are yours."

"But how—?" I faltered. "Where—?"

She looked away, her eyes narrowing reminiscently. "I thought, 'The boys should not go unrewarded.' And I thought, 'A diamond, perhaps, for each, would be very, very nice.' I've told you." She shrugged indifferently. "What Tatiana thinks, comes true."

"You mean," I said, "you only *thought* you'd like to have a diamond for each of us, and—"

"So!" Tatiana smiled fondly as at a wide-eyed child. "They were there."

I looked in amazement at Tim. But his handsome mouth was twisted, and his eyes on Tatiana were coldly contemptuous.

"And now, toots," he sneered, "let's see you think about a couple of Cadillacs."

Tatiana winced, then lifted her chin defiantly.

"Don't, Tim," I said. I couldn't seem to look away from the gem lying on my palm.

"I will go now," Tatiana murmured, rising. But it was evidently a polite phrase which she didn't mean. She might have said, *"Try to let me go."* For the small, wise smile said it. And the arched brows. And the shining head, tilted ever so slightly toward her left shoulder. A change seemed to have come over her. For she appeared to be playing with us, cat-like.

Yet—I couldn't help it!—I said, "You can't go. The rain. Your hair. It's so beautiful."

Tim laughed at me sharply. "You sound like the dialogue in a play by Tchekov." His sneer deepened. "From 'beyond the farthest star,'" he quoted. "With no hat and two pop-bottles that we're supposed to believe are diamonds." He stood up so abruptly that his chair screeched protestingly on the linoleum. He looked with hatred at Tatiana. "Stay the night, then, since you must. You

can sleep on the living room sofa. I wouldn't send a dog out into that."

The three of us listened to the rain as if it were the most important thing of all, just then. As if, by concentrating on the sound of the drops lashing futilely against the pane, could escape the uncomfortable tension here within the room.

I couldn't understand Tim's look of hatred. It seemed far too strong an emotion for the girl to have caused in him. For what had she done? Nothing. Nothing to make Tim react so violently. And yet it was as if they continued a quarrel begun before I was present—a quarrel whose origin I did not know.

I think now it was some sixth sense warning Tim against the girl—as it should have warned me. But then I only looked at her—and listened to the rain.

"In the morning," Tim finished, almost viciously, *"get out of here!"*

But Tatiana only smiled.

YET, when we were in our bedroom, Tim's anger seemed to evaporate as quickly as it had come, and he appeared less certain of himself than I had ever known him. So apparent was the change in him that I even ventured to ask, "Why did you say that to her"—though at any other time I would have been reluctant to risk his possible irritation at the question.

Tim rubbed his forehead as if it ached. Slowly he divested himself of his clothing, threw his trousers across the back of a chair. "Because—" He turned to look at me, and I could almost have sworn that fear lurked in the depths of his dark eyes. "We should have made her leave. Now. Tonight."

There was a startled pause, then I went over to rest my hand lightly on his arm. "Tim, what is it? What's so alarming about Tatiana? Why do you seem to hate her so?"

He looked at me, puzzled, and he sounded half-ashamed, half-defiant when he answered, "Because I'm afraid. Afraid, and I don't know why. But there's something about her—"

I knew the puzzlement was in my own eyes now. Tim—afraid! That couldn't be! I was the timid one—not Tim. And I certainly didn't fear Tatiana. Slowly I tried to find a reason for his fear.

"Is it the diamonds?" I asked. "And the talk about her thoughts coming true?" And though I didn't really believe it, I added, "Because it's probably nothing. A joke, that she'll explain in the morning."

But Tim only shook his head stubbornly. "You'll see. You'll be sorry we let her stay."

Maybe it was the certainty in his voice. Maybe his fear was contagious. Maybe it was merely the cold damp air blowing through our widely opened windows.

But I shivered again. And a curious conviction seized me that one day I would wish I had listened to Tim.

WE AWOKE in the morning to the incomparable scent of coffee filling the apartment. Tatiana had obviously risen before us.

Tim seemed more like himself this morning. But his manner was overlaid with something that was alien to him—something I had to puzzle over before I recognized it for what it was. Embarrassment. He wanted me to forget his odd alarm of the night before. And I, eager to see if Tatiana's strange enchantment would survive the disillusioning light of day, was only too willing to assume that Tim was once more as he'd always been.

Tatiana had chosen the chair directly before the kitchen window, and her hair was a vivid blot against a world of white. The rain had changed during the night to wet, clinging snow, and the elms back of the apartment house were gaudily decked out in cotton and tinsel.

It started at once.

"Good morning," she said. "And what are you going to do today, Kerry?"

Ignoring Tim. Baiting Tim. Not impishly. Motivated by something more ominous than mischief. I felt my heart sinking. Who was this girl? Why was she here? Or had her presence neither meaning nor purpose? I was never to know.

Tim must have sensed the implied taunt in her words, for he rose to it bluntly. "*You're* getting out. Kerry and I—"

The kitchen crackled with antagonism. I grew increasingly uneasy. I dropped a spoon.

Tatiana was shaking her head sadly, sure of herself. "It's too bad if Kerry and you have made any plans. Because I think, Tim, you'll have a ten o'clock appointment with Frank Warner."

Tim sniffed contemptuously. "Don't be crazy. Frank's in an Army camp down in Texas." He waited for Tatiana to speak, but as she continued to remain silent, smiling in superior fashion, he grew excited. "Isn't he, Kerry? We're even keeping the keys of his house for him while he's away, aren't we, Kerry?"

I couldn't answer. It was unnerving to listen to Tim, pleading, almost as if he wanted to be convinced against his better judgment that what he was saying was true.

Nor did it help matters any for Tatiana only to repeat comfortably, "At ten o'clock." And she became intent upon spreading jelly over her toast, as if she wished to indicate that she'd grown weary of an absurd argument too greatly prolonged.

The thing was getting on my nerves. How could she be so sure? For that matter, how could she possibly have known of Frank Warner?

The telephone shrilled in the gallery leading from reception hall to dining room.

Tatiana smiled her secret half-smile, her emerald eyes absorbed as if set on some inward vision. I felt that she was *willing* the telephone to ring. I was sure of it.

The telephone grew insistent. But I couldn't have moved. I think I knew then.

Tim said something under his breath, harshly. He stood up, his face hard. Defiantly he left the kitchen. I heard his heels on the uncarpeted gallery floor. The bell was silenced in the middle of an angry peal, and then there was the low murmur of Tim's voice.

But I knew, even before he came back. I could tell from his footsteps on the gallery floor, lagging more and more as he approached the kitchen. When he came in there was a queer, unbelieving expression on his face. He said what he had to say lifelessly.

"It was Frank. He was given a medical discharge. He wants me to meet him downtown with his keys—at ten o'clock."

And he looked at Tatiana then with such a strange expression on his lean, handsome face that I'll remember it always.

WHEN Tim had gone without a goodbye, Tatiana washed the dishes and I dried them. Later I was to think it odd that I didn't question her then about this eerie faculty she possessed of making her thoughts come true.

Or did she?

Perhaps it was merely that she plucked from the ether advance knowledge of events already ordained. But that wouldn't explain the diamonds. They were tangible enough. Although, of course, she might already have had them in her possession. But then why, in the name of all that was holy, hadn't she sold them to ward off her seeming destitution? Unless, as Tim had suggested, they were pop-bottles?

I shook my head, baffled, and watched her rinse the dishpan, wipe it neatly, and dry her hands on the kitchen towel.

"A very domestic scene," she said demurely.

But it wasn't. In my heart, I knew that it wasn't. Oh, the props were all there. It was Tatiana who didn't belong. She seemed a peri, come to play with earthly things. And presently they would bore her. And she would be gone.

She came to me, nearer, until the strange eyes were glowing into mine and her hands were on my shoulders. "I love you," she said huskily.

I could feel my breath come quicker. And my own eyes must have dilated, for Tatiana's bright head was suddenly a top spinning dizzily before me. There was a thudding in my chest, a thickening in my throat. "Who are you? Where do you come from? Why are you here?"

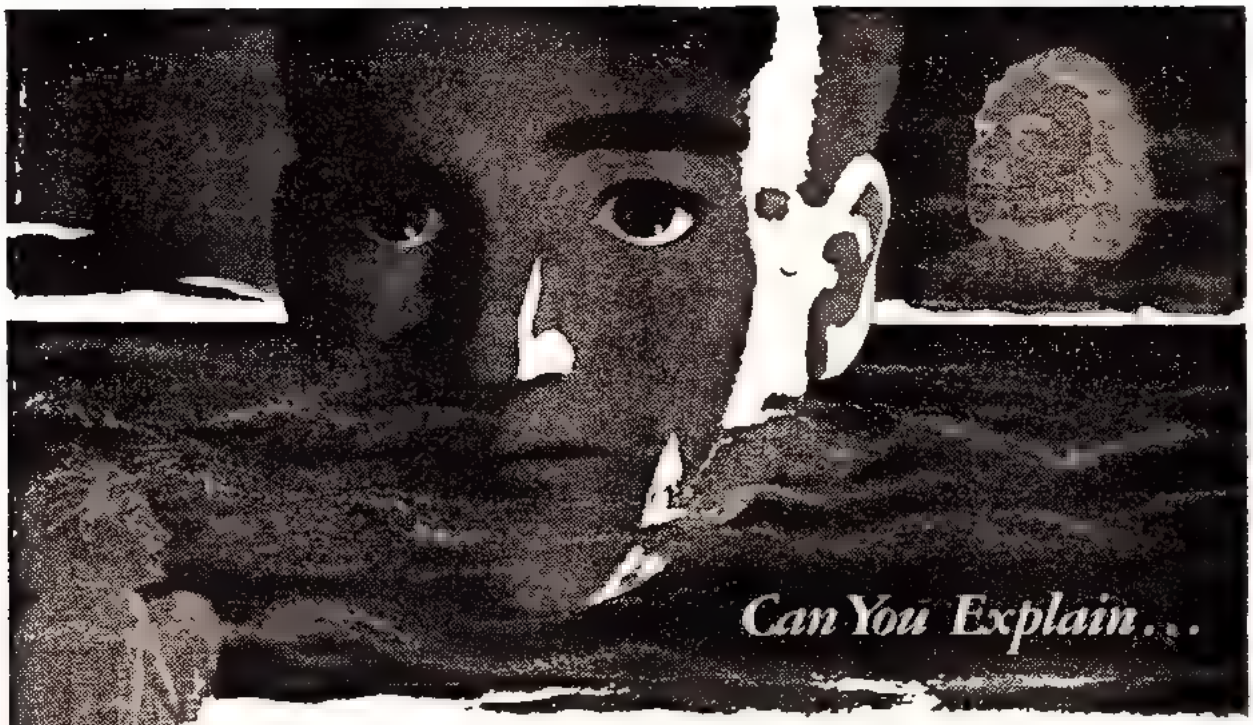
Again the Gioconda smile. "Does it matter?"

And looking into her slumberous-lidded eyes, I knew that it did not. Her parted lips were all I could see . . . a venomous flower, beckoning, luring, irresistible.

The room whirled, a carousel gone suddenly mad. I couldn't stand this. This sense of not being. This inexplicable ecstasy, twisting at me, tearing. Slowly I bent my head, pressed my parted lips to hers, held her softness crushingly against me.

When Tim came back at two, it was to find Tatiana sitting on the sofa. I was on the floor at her feet, my head in her lap. I looked up at Tim standing under the arch leading to the living room, and saw his face slowly settling into implacable lines, his eyes darkening with suppressed fury.

(*Continued on page* 88)



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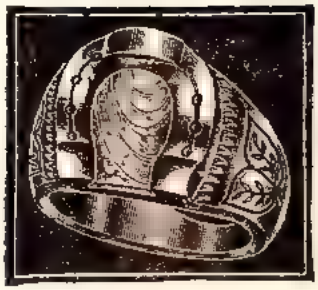

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(*Continued from page* 86)

He came all the way into the room, and stood looking down at us, his hands thrust into his trousers pockets. And the hatred, formerly directed at Tatiana alone, now included me.

"So you're still here," he snapped to Tatiana.

He reached down, caught my necktie in his right hand, yanked me to my feet. "You damned fool!" Anger made his voice ragged. "I don't know who she is, or what. But anyone can see she's a trouble-maker."

Tatiana put her hands behind her head, arched her body contentedly against the sofa's back. "Into everyone's life trouble must come. Is it important whether I am the cause of it—or another?"

And at the sound of her murmurous voice I said to Tim, shakily, "Take your hands off me."

His fist tightened first on my tie, then he pushed me back onto the sofa. He said, "The diamonds, in case you want to know, are about two carats each in weight, blue-white, of the finest water." He took his from his pocket, looked at it for a long moment, then tossed it into Tatiana's lap. "Go on, get out," he said then, and the quietness of his voice only emphasized the sharpness of the command.

I stood up uncertainly. "Tim!"

Tatiana said lazily, "Until Kerry tells me to go—I stay."

Tim put his fists on his narrow hips, looked at me challengingly. "Well?"

And Tatiana looked at me, and she, too, said "Well?"

IT WAS up to me. I'll always remember that scene, and my deepening sense of shame because I was playing so unheroic a part. It isn't easy to change the habit of a lifetime, if, indeed, it's possible. Old memories flooded back—Tim and I, always together. Not in nearly thirty years had we been separated. And it was Tim's decisions that had always been the right ones, always decided our course of action. I wavered helplessly.

As if she were reading my mind, Tatiana said softly, "After all, Kerry, you had to fall in love sometime. You know what's really the matter, don't you? Tim—he hates me, because I've come between you."

"You don't understand." I sank into a lounge chair, covered my face with my hands. "Tim isn't guilty of some unwholesome jealousy. He wouldn't care if I'd fallen in love with somebody else—somebody—"

"Ah! Tatiana came over to kneel before me, clasp her arms around my legs. She raised her head, looked up into my face. "Somebody—not me? Somebody who would not really separate you. Oh, I know. I might have made him like me, but it was too late. The will to hate was too strong."

Tim laughed sharply, like a lash across her words. But we hardly heard him. I caught at her shoulders, bent forward to kiss her swiftly.

"And I—I love you," I said hopelessly.

She spread her hands. "Then it is so very simple. Tim does not matter. Tell me to stay. Tell Tim to go."

"Yeah, tell me to go," Tim scoffed.

I rubbed my aching forehead. "I can't, Tatiana. How can I make you see? Perhaps only a twin could understand. But it's as if Tim and I were two halves of a whole. If we were estranged, I'd be only half alive."

She sank back on her heels, her eyes studying my face. "You want me to go?"

"No." And I knew I sounded like a fool.

Tim laughed again. "He seems unable to make up his mind. He's always been like that."

Involuntarily, I drew back at that laugh. I suppose it seemed as if I cringed. I'll never forget the look on Tatiana's face at that. It had always been like this, I thought dully. People seemed to like me well enough at first. Until Tim came along, with his way of making my every word and action seem the ineffectual fumblings of a fool.

I sighed aloud, and Tatiana appeared to come to a decision. She rose, and even I recoiled at the look she turned on Tim. Yet her words, when they came, were more sad than angry.

"You've succeeded well, Tim. You've turned Kerry into a creature without will or initiative. But then, you've had a lifetime in which to succeed. How could I hope to combat you?

Tim looked pleased with himself. Tatiana must have caught the last faint flicker

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of his expression as she slipped into her polo-coat, belted it about her.

"I understand your satisfaction," she said coldly. "It is not easy to defeat Tatiana. You may well look pleased with yourself. But perhaps, even yet, you have not won."

I made one last attempt, however feeble. "Tatiana, don't go. I love you."

Her hand on the doorknob, she nodded, but she might have been looking at a stranger. "Yes, you do. You always will." Her eyes went to Tim, secure in his triumph, though she continued to talk to me. "And I think some day, Kerry, you will grow to hate Tim for coming between us—I really think you will."

Then she was gone, closing the door behind her, leaving me staring at Tim—at nothing. And for once Tim evaded my eyes.

WAS it that very night? Or nights later? How can I remember? But there came a night, and the sound of quiet breathing from Tim's bed.

My feet slid from under the covers, groped in the dark for my cordovan slippers, sought their chill depths. I took the camel's hair robe from the foot of my bed, and shuffled quietly, silently, down the long gallery to the living room. I lit no lamp, but fumbled in the leather box on the coffee table for a cigarette, held a match briefly to its tip. I sat in darkness then. Only occasionally did the mirror opposite the sofa reflect the glowing pinpoint of my cigarette.

I stared into darkness, my thoughts tortured, chaotic. How many nights like this had I known since Tatiana's going? Or was this the first? It couldn't be. This miserable unhappiness was a pain I'd endured for eternities.

I shivered and wrapped the robe closer about me. It was cold. And I was alone. I needn't have been. There might have been slanted green eyes glowing lambently into mine. There might have been hot, moist lips beneath my own. There might have been a body, warm, vibrant, alive—

I stiffened.

It was Tim's fault! A whisper, sly, in my mind. The cigarette was held now, forgotten, in my fingers.

Yes, it was all Tim's fault. My mouth twitched. I—I didn't like Tim. I'd never liked him, really. I hated Tim!

My eyes narrowed to slits, there in the dark. The sly whisper was a scream now, rising in mad crescendo.

I hated Tim. God, how I hated him!

I threw up my head, suddenly, and listened. I could hear it, even here. The quiet, even sound of Tim's breathing. It filled the apartment, like the pulsing of a not-far-distant dynamo.

I smiled. And there was cunning in the smile. And my mind was busy with crafty plans, selecting, rejecting, finally—accepting. The mirror on the opposite wall once again reflected the glowing pinpoint of light. I watched it widen as my cheeks sucked in, inhaling deeply of the cigarette.

Then carefully—oh, so carefully!—I extinguished it in the black marble ashtray, and stood up. I must be quiet—so very, very quiet. Cautiously I groped my way to the gallery. The stars were not more soundless than I. The wall under my hand, guiding my footsteps. The bedroom door.

Sh!

Try not to think. Lest the waves of hatred leap from your mind to waken the silent sleeper.

Sh!

Perhaps he could hear you—even above the beating, beating, beating of that dynamo, surging, hurting your ears unbearably, filling the place with intolerable sound.

Sh!

Watch them now. Your hands. Extending, hovering. Pale vultures in the gloom.

The pulsations of the dynamo stopped.

Later, there was that hot, bright light. A hard chair, armless, uncomfortable. They wouldn't let me smoke, but they smoked themselves, blowing the acrid fumes tantalizingly into my nostrils. And always there were the voices, endlessly repeating, "Why? Why? Why did you do it?"

Until, at last, I wiped my damp palms on my tweed-covered knees, and tried to tell them about Tatiana.

But I couldn't seem to make them understand that Tatiana had said, "I think some day, Kerry, you will grow to hate Tim. . . ."

I couldn't seem to make them understand that what Tatiana thought—came true.

And when they never found her—for how could *they* go beyond the farthest star?—they sent me here

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A Mixture of Wonder and Horror

WRITES Edmond Hamilton about his novelette in this issue:

I got the idea for "Priestess of the Labyrinth" some time ago when I was reading Robert St. John's account of his escape from Crete at the time the Germans conquered it in early 1941.

St. John tells how, when the Nazis were sweeping down over the Balkans and momentarily expected to attack Crete, he reached the island and contacted the British vice-consul. To his astonishment, the vice-consul would talk only about the nearby ruins of ancient Knossos.

The Nazi paratroopers were already coming, the decimated Allied forces were retreating to Egypt in every available fishing-boat, enemy bombers were blackening the skies, but the vice-consul wasn't interested—all he wanted to talk about was his obsession, the ancient Cretan civilization. He blandly offered to take the exhausted, harried fugitives out on a sightseeing trip to the ruins.

Well, I felt a certain sympathy with that vice-consul. I can see how a man would get so interested in the Cretan riddle that he'd be unaware that things were tumbling down around his ears. For I've always felt that with one exception, the Carthaginian, there never was so strange and fascinating a civilization as that of Crete.

My interest started years ago when I first got a look at the wonderful Cretan snake-goddess that's up in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Go look at it if you want to see sculpture that outdoes anything the later Greek sculptors ever did. And almost as fine are the famous wild-bull cups, which are animal figures topping even the Assyrian lions.

In Sir Arthur Evans' books you'll find descriptions of the incredibly modern life of the

Cretans of the great age. Palaces equipped with modern plumbing, bull-fights that were really super-rodeos, modes of dress that would be almost at home in our own cities—in some of these ways the Cretans seem far nearer to us than the later Greeks.

But in other ways, they were alien enough. There's something dark and sinister about the legends that are all we really have of Cretan history, something vaguely horrifying that you don't find in the myths of later Greeks.

There are tantalizing hints that a few of the Cretans dabbled in scientific research with rather appalling results. The most famous of these tales, that of the great scientist Daedalus who made artificial wings which brought about the death of his son, is of course familiar enough.

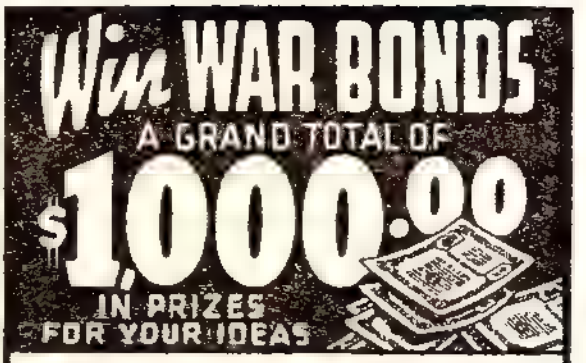
But there are other myths, about Minos and his queen and the Labyrinth that Daedalus built, which are too blackly terrible to be printed in anything but the obscuring Attic of Diodorus Siculus and Athenaeus and a few other of the old Greek writers. And it's that strange mixture of wonder and horror, of lights and shadows, that made me want to write this story about Crete. *Edmond Hamilton.*

What Can a Writer Say

RAY BRADBURY, who thinks that there isn't much a writer can say about himself that he hasn't already said in his story, tells us:

After writing a story like "The Poems" I go through and see how many times I've used some of my favorite words. All writers have certain words they especially like. With me it's "amber" or "pendulum" or "merry-go-round" or "calliope." There's something about merry-go-rounds and brass callipoes that, to use the current slang, *sends* me. Perhaps it is the childhood memories, from which my stories are extracted, that are aroused by the shrill tooting and wheezing of callipoes and the up and down going nowhere in a brilliant circle of those carnival horses, that prompts me to use those words and those objects in so many of my tales. As for "pendulum" it was the title of my first published story three years ago. Only Freud could tell you what a pendulum could possibly mean in my life; perhaps the fear of passing time, growing old, death; perhaps some subtle movement, balance, or rhythm.

There's really not much a writer can say about himself that he hasn't already said in the story, unwittingly. The kind of people in his story,



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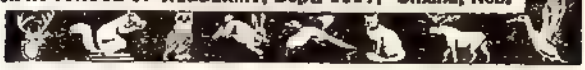

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their beliefs, their fears, their reactions, their tastes, are pretty indicative of the author's mind; even if some of the people in the yarn appear to be exact opposites. As a child I often feared I would die before I had a chance to (1) attend the Saturday matinee of the new Tom Mix serial, (2) make a trip to Chicago in the spring to see a real life stage show, (3) procure a rabbit with which to practice my magic tricks on unsuspecting but tolerant relatives. A good part of my life has been spent anticipating a merciless doom that might descend the day before some personal triumph or happiness or expectation was fulfilled. I believe I even feared being struck down by some wandering automobile the day I walked to get the first copy of WEIRD TALES with my name in it. A good deal of that apprehension has passed, though. It gets rather boring waiting so many years to be given the old heave-ho into hell or heaven, and waking up every morning very much alive in spite of all fears to the contrary. So I imagine I shall be around a few more years, somewhat more peaceful of mind, and not worrying about that Saturday matinee half as much, and if I should die before the next Ingrid Bergman film it would be cruel, I dare say, but no more than I have expected. And, in dying, I could shout triumphantly, "I told you so! I knew I wouldn't get to see my name on the WEIRD TALES cover again, confound it!"

So, fears, prejudices, and premonitions and all the rest, I imagine you pretty well know me from my stories. The refusal to meet death inherent in the theme of "There Was An Old Woman," "The Ducker," "The Reunion" and "The Scythe." The escape motive apparent in "The Sea Shell," and in this newest story "The Poems."

Outside of all the above, I find time, between covert glances over either shoulder, to do publicity work for the American Red Cross Blood Donor Drive, meet Leigh Brackett twice a month at the beach for a literary gabfest and a bit of volleyball; read Thomas Wolfe, Eudora

READERS' VOTE

PRIESTESS OF THE LABYRINTH	SHIP-IN-A-BOTTLE
REVOLT OF THE TREES	THE INVERNESS CAPE
THE GREEN GODS RING	THORNE ON THE THRESHOLD
	THE POEMS
	TATIANA

Here's a list of eight stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3, respectively, against your three favorite tales — then clip it out and mail it in to us.

WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza **New York City**

Welty and Katherine Ann Porter, and panoply my mother's Swedish meatball sandwiches with large slices of onion. Otherwise my life is calm except when Hank Kuttner writes to kick hell out of me about some purple passage that slipped through and bungled the works in my last yarn. I often wish that C. L. Moore would start writing Weirds again and drive some of us upstarts out of business. *Ray Bradbury.*

Warning!

MANLY WADE WELLMAN sent us this little note pertaining to John Thunstone's latest adventure, "Thorne on the Threshold." Writes Wellman:

Very briefly, let me say that the demoniac invocations in this story are up to a certain point accurate. Where they differ from the orthodox, I have changed them deliberately; because, whatever the stories of John Thunstone may be, they certainly are not going to become easy lessons for amateur diabolists.

Manly Wade Wellman.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of WEIRD TALES, published bi-monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1944. State of New York, County of New York, ss.

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared William J. Delaney, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the President-Treasurer of SHORT STORIES, INC., Publishers of WEIRD TALES, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

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2. That the owner is: SHORT STORIES, INC., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.; William J. Delaney, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

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(*Signed*) W. J. DELANEY, *President.*

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 22nd day of September, 1944.

[SEAL] (*Signed*) HY. J. PAUROWSKI.

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The entire cost is only $12 a year, and that applies to men and women between the ages of 15 and 64 inclusive. Between the ages of 65 and 75 the cost is only $18 a year. No reduction in benefits regardless of age. No medical examination is required.

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North American Accident Insurance Company of Chicago is one of America's great insurance companies, the largest and oldest exclusive health and accident insurance company in this country. It has paid out over $35,000,000 to grateful policyholders when they needed help most. North American is under the supervision of the Insurance Departments of 47 States and District of Columbia.

Men and women who would like full details about this new plan are urged to write a letter or postcard for a revealing booklet called "Cash or Sympathy." This booklet is absolutely free. It will come by ordinary mail, without charge or obligation of any kind. No one will call to deliver it. We suggest you get a free copy by sending your name and address with postal zone number to Premier Policy Division, North American Accident Insurance Co., 830 Broad Street, Dept. 1946, Newark 2, New Jersey.

Here's the Kind of MEN I Build!

Charles Atlas

An actual untouched photo of Charles Atlas, holder of the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

Will You Let Me PROVE I Can Make YOU a New Man?

I DON'T care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add SOLID MUSCLE to your biceps — yes, on each arm — in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day — right in your own home — is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system INSIDE and OUTSIDE! I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice, new, beautiful suit of muscle!

What's My Secret?

"Dynamic Tension!" That's the ticket! The *identical natural* method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-chested weakling I was at 17 to my present super-man physique! Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens — *my way.* I give you *no gadgets or contraptions to fool with.* When you have learned to develop your strength through *"Dynamic Tension"* you can laugh at *artificial* muscle-makers. You simply utilize the DORMANT muscle-power in your own God-given body — watch it increase and multiply double-quick into real, solid LIVE MUSCLE.

Only 15 Minutes a Day

My method — *"Dynamic Tension"* — will turn the trick for you. No *theory* — every exercise is *practical.* And, man, *so easy!* Spend only 15 minutes a day in your own home. From the very start you'll be using my method of *"Dynamic Tension"* almost unconsciously every minute of the day — walking, bending over, etc. — to BUILD MUSCLE and VITALITY.

FREE BOOK "Everlasting Health and Strength"

In it I talk to you in straight-from-the-shoulder language. Packed with inspirational pictures of myself and pupils — fellows who became NEW MEN in strength, my way. Let me show you what I helped THEM do. See what I can do for YOU. For a real thrill, send for this book *today.* AT ONCE. CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 9M, 115 East 23rd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 9M,
115 East 23rd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of *"Dynamic Tension"* will help make a New Man of me — give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name .....
(Please print or write plainly.)

Address .....

City ..... State .....

☐ Check here if under 16 for Booklet A.

OUTGUESS THE WEATHERMAN

AMAZING FORECASTER

PREDICTS THE WEATHER 24 HOURS IN ADVANCE

READ ALL ABOUT THE "SWISS" WEATHER HOUSE AND **FREE** GIFT OFFER IF YOU ACT AT ONCE

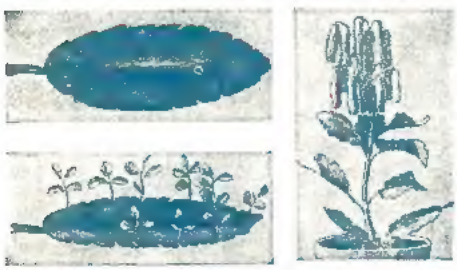
NOW YOU CAN BE YOUR OWN WEATHERMAN!

Why pay $5 or $10 for a barometer when you can predict the weather yourself, at home, 8 to 24 hours in advance, with this accurate, inexpensive Weather House forecaster? It's made like a little Swiss cottage, with a thatched green roof and small green shutters. Inside the house is an old witch and a little boy and girl. When the weather's going to be fine, the little boy and girl come out in front. But when bad weather is on the way the old witch makes an appearance. There is an easy-to-read thermometer on the front of the cottage that shows you the exact temperature . . . . **Here is positively the most amazing introductory advertising offer ever made.** But you must act quickly—prices may rise.

FREE for Prompt Action

Good Luck Leaf Lives On Air Alone

The greatest novelty plant ever discovered! Tradition is—a person owning one of these plants will have much good luck and success. When planted in earth, it grows two feet tall and blooms beautifully.



Here's What Weather House Owners Say:

"My neighbors now phone me to find out what the weather is going to be. We certainly think the Weather House is marvelous." Mrs. I. S. Amsterdam, Ohio.

"Please rush 6 more Weather Houses. I want to give them away as gifts. They are wonderful." Mrs. I. F., Booth Bay, Maine.

"I saw your Weather House at a friend's home and the way they raved about it. I decided to order one for myself." Mrs. L. R., Chicago, Illinois.

"Ever since I got my Weather House I've been able to plan my affairs a day ahead. It's wonderful." Mrs. D. L. B., Shenandoah, Iowa.

SEND NO MONEY

When your Weather House arrives just deposit through your Postman $1.69 (your total cost), plus postage. Then test the Weather House for accuracy. Watch it closely, see how perfectly it predicts the weather in advance, then if you don't agree it's worth many dollars more than the small cost, simply return your Weather House within 10 days and get your money back promptly.

Almost every day of your life is affected in some way by the weather, and it's such a satisfaction to have a reliable indication of what the weather will be. With the "Swiss" Weather House made in the U. S. A. and easy-to-read thermometer you have an investment in comfort and convenience for years to come. The Weather House comes to you complete and ready to use. Ideal for gifts and bridge prizes. It will bring new pleasure to everyone in your family. The price is only $1.69 C. O. D. You must act now to secure this price.

DOUBLE VALUE COUPON—MAIL TODAY

The Weather Man, Dept. NFC
29 East Madison Street.
Chicago, Illinois

10 DAY TRIAL OFFER

Send at once (1) "Swiss" Weather House. On arrival I will pay postman $1.69 plus postage with the understanding that the Weather House is guaranteed to work accurately. Also I can return the Weather House for any reason within 10 days and get my money back.

☐ Send C. O. D. ☐ I enclose $1.69. You Pay Postage.

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